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Editor's LETTER

Amid a Lingering Coronavirsus Pandemic, Can a 2020 PCA Trade Show Possibly Meet Expectations?

PCA faces daunting challenges in trying to roll out what it had hoped to be a fresh start for this year's trade show—a rebranded association, lots of new initiatives.

It hasn't quite worked out as intended.

First came a pretty jarring development that four of the largest exhibitors— Altadis U.S.A., General Cigar Company, Davidoff of Geneva, Drew Estate would not be participating. A fifth major exhibitor by booth allotment—Kretek International-Phillips & King International—subsequently joined that list, although that company also happens to own and produce its own trade show, the Tobacco Plus Expo which is held in late January/early February. Traditionally TPE hasn't had much overlap, encompassing equal parts tobacco exhibitors, vape exhibitors, and alternative categories. But vape is down, CBD is up, and TPE has been adding more premium cigar exhibitors the past two years. It also appears to have drawn more traditional tobacconists to attend. The timing is good for shops looking ahead to the year from the vantage point of coming off the slow post-holiday rush. Manufacturers have a similar outlook, seeing it as a good time to launch some new products.

But then came travel restrictions, sheltering mandates, and subsequent economic chaos from the spreading coronavirus pandemic.

PCA is not in an enviable position at this point.

Considering the economy has been cranking the past few years, yet the rumblings about attendance at the show have still persisted, what are the realistic expectations at this point for good retailer turnout given the economic clobbering many stores have been suffered due to mandated closing of "non-essential" services in many states or cities? Add in the unknown desire of retailers wanting to travel due to health risks, and doubts about the normalcy of processes and services at the Venetian / Sands Convention by July 10, and at the very least it's a pretty safe conclusion that it's highly unlikely attendance could possibly be up this year. The show that has briefly been reschedule for just after the PCA in July, rescheduled for October. That would be of no use for the cigar industry, so it's either a go or not.

If there has ever been a recurring theme for endless analysis year after year for the summer RTDA / IPCPR / PCA Trade Show—it's the subject of attendance, which tends to fluctuate but overall has consistently struggled to meet expectations for many exhibitors in recent years. The number of retail accounts has averaged about 790 the past six years, while the number of issued attendee badges averages about 2030 over the same period, or about 2-1/2 people per store. It's pretty well know that retailers often bring friends or good customers on their store badge allotment, but it's hard to say that has an significant bearing. The PCA says it represents over 3,000 specialty retailers, so depending upon how you compare attendance and participation at the show to the association's membership leaves an open debate as to what percentage of PCA membership typically attends.

It many respects, it's an unfair yardstick for those with long memories to recall packed trade shows, since there's the illusion of density—the show floor has been growing in size for years, meaning even the same amount of attendees spread across a larger space "feels" less busy. As of press time, the PCA 2020 show exhibit map looked to be struggling, and the list of exhibiting companies stood at 110 discrete firms, not a big jump from the 90 or so that were shown on the list in January. Companies seem to still be waiting. But for how long?

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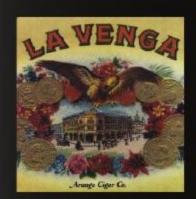








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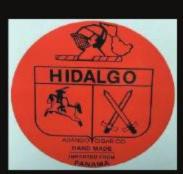














Retailing NEWS ** TRENDS & TRENDS & TRENDS & TRENDS ETTERS IN TOBACCO RETAILING





Industry Veteran George Sosa Partners with Pennsylvania-Based Cigar Cigars to Open Florida Lounges

SARASOTA, FLORIDA—Longtime cigar industry sales executive George Sosa has partnered with Arthur "Art" Toll, owner of Pennsylvania-based Cigar Cigars, as co-owner and operator of the firm's first Florida locations—initially a pair of shops located in Sarasota, Fla.

Toll founded Cigar Cigars in Horsham, Pa., in 1995, and has grown the business to 16 locations in the greater Philadelphia and New Jersey area. With the addition of the of the first Sarasota store, there are now 17 locations in operation. In 2018, Cigar Cigars was invited to join the Tobacconists' Association of America, accessing TAA-exclusive cigar releases from member manufacturers.

Cigar Cigars Broadway, located at Broadway Promenade in downtown Sarasota's arts and cultural district, held its soft grand opening on February 25, but joined other "non-essential" services having to close under a statewide stay-at-home order issued on April 1 by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to reduce the spread of Covid-19. The shop was among those Florida businesses permitted to reopen May 4 under the first phase of restriction rollbacks.

The entire shop—appointed in a festive Miami-style turquoise and orange color scheme—is humidified and serves as a giant walk-in humidor. To keep the combination humidor and lounge space comfortable, Sosa says they invested heavily on an air evacu-



ation system that pumps in fresh air while a separate air extraction system evacuates smoke. "The cost trade-off with air conditioning / electric bill is well worth the investment," Sosa explains, noting the system's performance has exceeded expectations in handling heavy smoking.

According to the original project timeline, the store was slated to open in October 2019, but Sosa says extensive permitting delays derailed that plan.

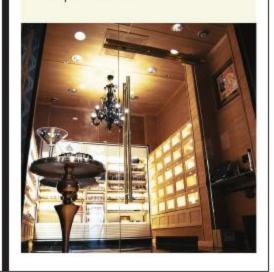
Cigar Cigars Parkway, located several miles away in North Sarasota, is a larger store under construction that will feature a private 24-hour lounge and beer and wine bar. An August or September opening is anticipated.

Following a 25-year career in the U.S. Navy, Sosa joined Perdomo Cigars in 2000 as sales manager, a role he held for five years before taking the same position at Miami Cigar and Company for two years. In 2007, he joined Alec Bradley Cigars as vice president of sales, a role he held for 12 years before teaming with Toll. Sosa says he plans to develop an addition three to four locations in the greater Sarasota area in the next year or two.

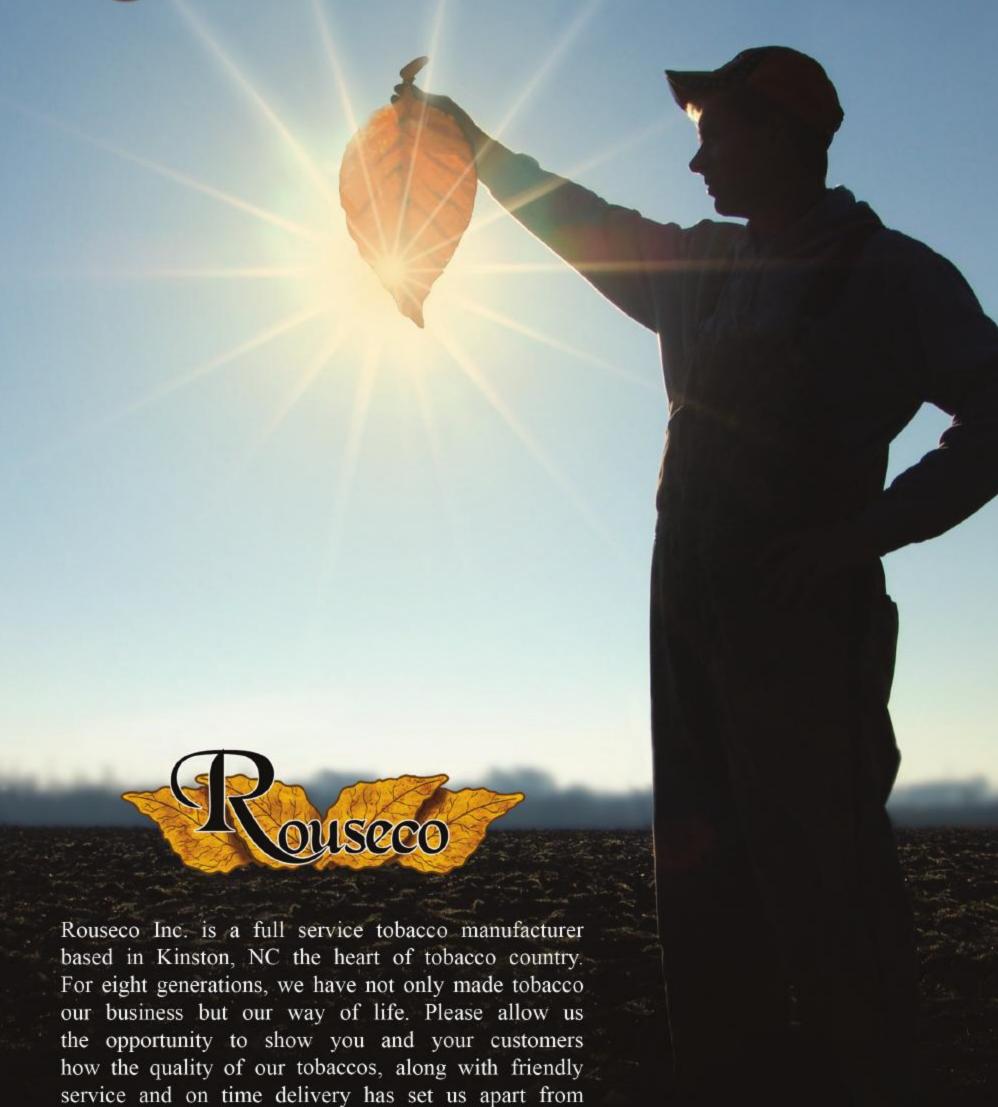
Bits&Pieces

Sammy Fiori and Sam Trisler, co-owners of Winston's Pipe and Cigar **Emporium** in Fort Smith, Ark., teamed together on a lounge joint-venture that opened early last year and has carved its own special following in Fort Smith.

The 3000 sq. ft. 906 Cocktail and Cigar Lounge occupies a renovated 100-year-old historic building on the Garrison Avenue Strip. Tall, exposed-beam ceilings set an impressive scale for the thoroughly modern build-out that features a "roaring '20s" style. The lounge features a granite-topped bar with an extensive selection of affordable to high-end spirits; a walk-in humidor with a range of styles and price points and separate Davidoff display; a lobby area used to stage live music on weekends; and a unique "theater area" appointed with oversize leather club chairs and a state-of-the-art 165-inch LED video wall that can display up to four discreet video feeds or one giant seamless picture, a boon to sports fans.



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others in the industry.

Industry NEWS ** PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, REGULATION, TRADE

Imperial Brands Reaches \$1.23 billion Deal to Sell Premium Cigar Business to Two Mystery-Backed Holding Companies

Imperial Brands PLC announced on April 27 that it has agreed to the sale of its worldwide premium cigar businesses to an investment consortia of individual investors in two distinct transactions—one for its U.S. business and one for its rest of the world businesstotaling \$1.225 billion. The transactions are expected to close in the third quarter of calendar year 2020.

Gemstone Investment Holding Ltd will acquire Imperial's Premium Cigar USA, which consists of companies that are currently held by Tabacalera USA—cigar maker Altadis U.S.A.; online retailers JR Cigars, Serious Cigars, and Cigars.com; and brick and mortar retailer Casa de Montecristo. That sale is valued at \$185 million, and includes the U.S. trademarks for the Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, H. Upmann, Henry Clay, Trinidad, Saint Luis Rey, and Casa de Garcia, among others.

Allied Cigar Corporation, S.L, which is based in Hong Kong, will acquire Imperial's Premium Cigar Rest of World (RoW) business for \$1.04 billion, which includes a 50 percent stake in Cuban cigar manufacturer and distributor Habanos SA.; Cuban cigarillo maker Internacional Cubana de Tabaco SA.; Cuban cigar marketer Promotora de Cigarros, SL; and stakes in several Habanos importers worldwide. It also includes non-Cuban premium handmade cigar sales operations outside the U.S., including the Vegafina brand, and cigar manufacturing

facilities in Honduras (La Flor de Copan in Santa Rosa de Copan) and Dominican Republic (Tabacalera de Garcia in La Romana). The Tabacalera de Garcia transaction isn't expected to close until 2021.

According to Imperial Brands, the investors behind Gemstone Investment Holding Ltd. and Allied Cigar Corporation SL want to remain anonymous. All proposed transactions are subject to the fulfillment of certain conditions, including customary antitrust and other regulatory clearances. The proceeds will be used for debt reduction.

Joint Interim Chief Executives Dominic Brisby and Joerg Biebernick said: "We are delighted to be able to announce the sale of Premium Cigars in the current challenging global environment. It has been a complex transaction involving joint venture partners and assets across multiple geographies and we would like to thank everyone involved for working so hard to get the deal agreed.

"This disposal reinforces our strategic ambition of becoming a leaner and more agile organization and the proceeds will realize value for shareholders by reducing debt as part of our ongoing focus on active capital management." "We believe we have found the right long-term owners for Premium Cigars; they are committed to investing in the business to maximize future growth opportunities and are well positioned to further develop operations internationally."

► Personnel Moves

> Frontier Brands, LLC announced the appointment of John Giese, Sr. as vice president of sales & marketing, tasked to lead marketing strategies and direct distribution efforts for the company's new Frontier Cheroots, launched in late 2019. Giese brings a long-established resume of building successful brands in a career spanning 41 years, having held various executive management positions within the industry. Giese served as leader of the sales & marketing team at John Middleton, where he was instrumental in the launch and

successful growth strategy that led Black & Mild Cigars to the #1 ranking in the U.S. for mass market cigars, and as a vice president of sales at STG, prio to opening Goose's Montecristo Lounge & Tobacconist in



Limerick, Pa. He has been named a Captain of the Industry by the Pennsylvania Distributors Association and honored as Tobacco Man of the Year by the Southern Association of Wholesale Distributors.

Bits&Pieces

El Septimo announced the expansion of their national sales team with the hiring of industry veteran, Roy MacLaren as the company's new executive vice president, effective March 10. MacLaren brings over 20 years of senior management and executive experience in the premium cigar industry. For nearly nine years, MacLaren served as vice president of sales and marketing at Gurkha Cigars; seven years at Davidoff of Geneva, where he served as the regional sales manager and worked closely with presidents of major chains, increasing sales growth in a seven-state region; three years as Villiger Cigars North America's president where he restructured and revitalized its U.S. operation, increasing sales in the first two years despite headcount reductions and budget restrictions. He has since had similar roles at Avanti Cigar Co., Crux Cigars, and most recently, Bahama Mamas, a subsidiary of PATG worldwide which is a \$2 billion conglomerate in the tobacco industry. The El Septimo premium cigar brand, founded in 2005, was acquired by La Grande Maison Younan Collection in 2019. Zaya S. Younan serves as chairman & c.e.o. of Younan Company and El Septimo Cigars.



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Régis Broersma Returns to Lead General Cigar Under Reorganization

GENTOFTE, DENMARK—Scandinavian Tobacco Group A/S (STG)—the parent company of General Cigar Co., Cigars International, STG Lane and others—announced that Régis Broersma has been appointed senior vice presi-

dent of STG's new North America Branded and Rest of World Division.

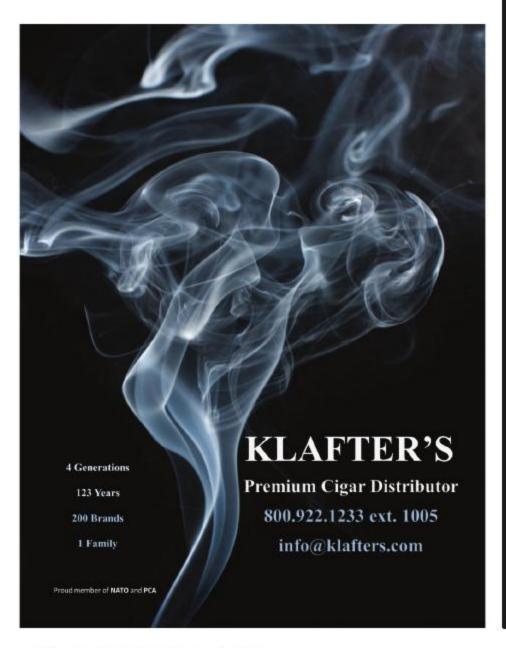
In this new appointment, Broersma returns permanently to his previous role as president of General Cigar Co. Régis' assumed his new role immediately on April 23, 2020. The announcement came as part of a reorganization of STG's global commercial organization and



Broersma

adds Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Global Travel Retail and others to Broersma's responsibilities.

Broersma's permanent return to General Cigar Co. follows a June 2019 announcement of his relocation to Europe, where he was charged with leading STG's smoking tobacco and accessories division. Broersma joined STG in 2002 and has since held various positions in the group including managing director of Scandinavian Tobacco Group Germany. He was appointed president of General Cigar Co. in 2016 and promoted to senior v.p. of STG's North American Branded business in 2018.



STG Integrates Agio Cigars, Unveils Major USA, Global Restructuring

DUIZEL, THE NETHERLANDS—Scandinavian Tobacco Group (STG) announced on April 23 plans to integrate Agio Cigars into the company, following the acquisition of the 116-year-old leading European cigar manufacturer on Jan. 2. The combination of the companies is expected to deliver substantial cost synergies within sales and marketing, production, and back office functions. The full integration is expected to be completed by the end of 2022, and is subject to legal approvals in various countries.

It is assumed that Agio Cigars will contribute to an increase in STG's earnings margin of more than 2 percentage points, based on estimates of net synergies of \$65.2 million.

As part of the integration, STG has changed its organizational structure, moving from four to three commercial divisions, and intends to optimize its operational footprint by closing three production sites and upgrading two others.

In order to increase speed-to-market and unlock synergies, STG will now operate commercial activities in three divisions by integrating the current Smoking Tobacco and Accessories Division into the North America Branded Division (NAB) and the Region Machine-made Cigar Division (MMC). NAB changed its name to North America Branded & RoW (Rest of World) Division, and MMC has changed its name to Europe Branded Division.

The North America Online & Retail Division (NAOR) will remain unchanged except for a move of its cigar wholesale business (Meir & Dutch) to North America Branded & RoW Division. The divisions will be headed by senior vice president Regis Broersma (NAB), senior vice president Jurjan Klep (MMC), and senior vice president Sarah Santos (NAOR).

To improve capacity utilization and reduce unit costs across the company's production footprint, STG said over the next nine to 18 months it will close Agio production facilities in Eersel and Duizel in the Netherlands and move production to its other production facilities. In addition, the cigar factory in Moca in the Dominican Republic will be closed in the near future. Following the changes, around 800 employees are expected to be laid off. Currently, STG has approximately 11,000 employees globally.

"The changes we announce today are a step further in our transformation of Scandinavian Tobacco Group," said STG c.e.o. Niels Frederiksen. "They impact most parts of our organization as we build a more competitive and profitable business with a powerful brand portfolio, strong market positions, and robust supply chains. It is an investment in our future and addresses the need for continuous optimization to remain competitive and succeed in tough market conditions. Regrettably, the changes also necessitate that we part ways with a number of hard-working and valued colleagues."

Royal Agio Cigars U.S.A., which was opened in 2017 in Bradenton, Fla. as the U.S. headquarters and distribution center for the Dutch company, is not a ongoing entity in STG's reorganization plan. At press time, STG Spokesperson Simon Mehl Augustesen confirmed that Royal Agio Cigars USA is being integrated into General Cigar Company, and that General Cigar is taking over the brand portfolio. However, some premium brands, including Balmoral, will be discontinued in the U.S.

Calendar

JULY 10-14, 2020

PCA 88th Annual Convention and International Trade Show Sands Expo Center, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: Premium Cigar Association (PCA), Washington, D.C., Tel: (202) 621-8064, Email: info@premiumcigars.org, Web: premiumcigars.org.

AUGUST 21-22, 2020

North American Society of Pipe Collectors (NASPC) 2020 Swap/Sell Pipe Show

Crowne Plaza Columbus North, Columbus, Ohio. Dealer Tables, \$120. Free attendance. Information and

table reservations: Jeff Knoll, (614) 306-6239, email: president@naspc.org, Web: naspc.org.

AUGUST 27—28, 2020

24th Annual Smoker Friendly Conference & Tobacco Festival

Omni Interlocken Resort, Broomfield, Colo. Contact: Mary Szarmach, Tollfree: (888) 751-2785 ext. 217, Email: info@smokerfriendly.com, Web: smokerfriendly.com.

SEPTEMBER 4—6, 2020

2nd Annual Muletown Pipe Show BriarWorks USA, Columbia, Tenn., Full or half vendor tables, \$100/\$50. Tickets, \$10 in advance. Web: muletownpipeshow.com, Email: info@briarworksusa. com., Tel: (931) 223-8985.

SEPTEMBER 18—20, 2020

InterTabac/InterSupply Dortmund Westfalenhallen Dortmund, Germany. 34th International Trade Fair Contact: Nina Kapitan, Tel: +(49)(231) 1204-586, Fax: +(49)(231) 1204-678, Email: mina.kapitan@westfalenhallen.de, Web: www.inter-tabac.de.

OCTOBER 3, 2020

3rd Sutliff Factory Tour Event Sutliff Tobacco Company, Richmond, Va., co-presented with Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers (CORPS). Admission \$5, CORPS members free. Smoking permitted. Factory tours, social smoking tent, live post show entertainment, blending seminars, food trucks serving lunch and dinner. Web: conclaveofrichmondpipesmokers.org.

After Original Venue Goes Out of Business, Covid-19 Forces Cancellation of Relocated Chicago Pipe Show

CHICAGO—The Chicagoland Pipe Collectors Club announced on March 26 that it had canceled its contract with the Westin Northwest Chicago Hotel in Itasca, Ill. for the 2020 Chicagoland International Pipe & Tobacco Show due to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. The show had been scheduled for May 1-3.

"The safety of our community is our primary concern and we have been monitoring the situation carefully hoping that countermeasures would reduce the rate at which the disease is spreading," explained Craig Cobine, show director, in announcing the cancellation. "However, the increased infections throughout the world, and here in the Chicago metro area, appear to be on the rise. The airline restrictions, combined with state and local restrictions on meetings, will make it impossible to hold our international show in 2020."

The cancellation followed months of concern as to whether or not the show's longtime venue, the Pheasant Run in St. Charles, Ill., would be operational as it became mired in financial difficulties. Contract obligations, and a lack of information from the resort's owners, complicated CPCC's ability to

sign on with a new venue. The facility, which had slashed its staff by 75 percent last November and was searching for a buyer, finally ceased operations on March 1, 2020. This closure followed an online auction in February failed to meet the resort's undisclosed minimum price, and drew a final \$6 million bid for the 18.3 acre site.

On March 2, CPCC was finally able to announce that the 2020 show would be held at the Westin Hotel in Itasca, Ill. on the originally scheduled May 1–3, 2020 dates. Show organizers—Cobine as well as Chuck Martin, Allan Boyd, and Paul Bender—scrambled to put the show together in "less than three months" and "under the most pressing of circumstances." Cobine thanked the group for the "many hours spent in finding and working with the Westin."

As late as March 15, the club said it was committed to holding this year's show, but was monitoring the Covid-19 situation was concerned with the health of all who planned to attend the show and had remained hopeful that travel restrictions, set to expire in mid-April, would permit the show to proceed.

"The Chicago Pipe Show thanks all of the exhibitors, sponsors, and supporters who registered for tables and



hotel room, Cobine added. Next year's Chicagoland Pipe Show is already confirmed for May 1-2, 2021 at the Westin Hotel in Itastca, III. CPCC said that all exhibitor deposits and payments for the canceled 2020 show would be considered as credits toward 2021 show tables, but that exhibitor refunds would be issued to any exhibitor that requests.

The CPCC started in 1993 with a small group of pipe smokers meeting at local lounges, trading information and ideas about the hobby of pipe collecting. Over time, the club established meeting venues where we could display our pipes and other smoking items and buy, sell and swap from each other. The first "Chicago Show" was held in 1996 and has steadily grown to one of the largest hobby shows of its type in the world. The 2020 edition of the show



David Blanco, President, Blanco Cigar Co.:

Duty Bound

For 22 years, Chicago native David Blanco has channeled four generations of his Cuban cigar making heritage, methodically carving a unique niche in the premium cigar market while juggling, at times precariously, ongoing military service. > BY E. EDWARD HOYT III

here are precious few cigar companies operating in the U.S. market today that were established as far back as the late 1990s. Countless dozens rose amid a rush to cash in on a hot business trend, while others dreamt of lofty artistic expression; regardless, the vast majority succumbed to the complex challenges inherent in successfully crafting, then selling, premium cigars.

Which isn't to say that Blanco Cigar Company President/CEO David Blanco, who grew up in the Windy City among an older generation of Cuban relatives, hasn't faced an even greater uphill battle in rekindling generations of cigar manufacturing heritage to forge a family business. In fact, Blanco's path has been repeatedly tested by challenges that might have easily discouraged others.

Perhaps it's a testament to another Blanco family tradition, that of military service, which seems to instill a sense of focused, goal-orient conviction that has helped define the company's personality and resiliency over the years.

"I grew up with cigar smoking in my house, with the older generation" Blanco explains. "It was like an old man thing, you know-they played dominoes, drank Cuban coffee, and smoked cigars. That's what cigar smoking was during my youth and as I growing up."

Blanco's immediate family had fled to Miami from Cuba in 1961, relocating a few years later to Chicago. "The family has been in the industry since 1886," says Blanco. "I'm the fifth generation in the industry, but the first generation born off the island in Cuba."

"Even though I was smoking at a young age, I was the only one my age," says Blanco, recalling there were no young people interested at the time. "It was the old men."

By his mid-twenties, having already served in the U.S. Army, worked as a Deputy Sheriff, and having just joined the Chicago Fire Department as a Paramedic Officer, Blanco suddenly saw the past, present, and future all collide.

"Bam, came the 1990s," says Blanco, "and suddenly Cigar Aficionado came into existence and the yuppies are all smoking cigars. I said, 'Holy cow, this might be an opportunity for me to get our family back into the business." Blanco approached his father, Cesar-an entrepreneur in the private sector and a public safety and law enforcement officer in the public sector-and his uncle, Francisco, and confessed, "I can't do this alone."

They said they'd be happy to come on board, "if I invested everything I owned." Only 26 years old, Blanco decided he was all-in, and the three men-the business was originally named Los Blancos Cigar Company—opened a factory in Ybor City in Tampa, where Blanco's uncle had retired to, while David and Cesar, who served as president/CEO, were based in Chicago.

"My father was handling the administrative and legal work; I was focused on product development, blending, and sales; and my uncle was managing the day-to-day manufacturing operations," says Blanco, who's energetic spirit and lifelong relationship with cigars proved to be the perfect combination to become an authentic ambassador and face of a new generation of cigar enthusiasts.

The factory was doing "really good work," Blanco recalls, staffed with other cousins that had come from Cuba that were rollers, but unfortunately after only two years, Francisco—a 20-year military veteran who had been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam—fell ill with multiple sclerosis and no choice but to leave the company. Without his expertise and leadership, the factory was forced to close.

Blanco had already been purchasing his tobacco from another family member-Cesar's cousin, Nestor Plasencia Sr. in Nicaragua—so it wasn't long before production was shifted to Plasencia's own factory in Estelí, where the Blancos have been working ever since.

For the first few years, Blanco had been figuring out blending himself, but after production was moved to Estelí, he was fortunate to be able to begin working with Plasencia's master blender, Evelio Oviedo Domínguez, who shared his expertise with the budding blender over the next decade.

"I was very lucky," says Blanco reverently of the late master. "The man had been in the tobacco industry since he was eight years old. He used to be the cigar rolling union president in Cuba before the revolution. He was head of the H. Upmann factory-production, quality control, head roller, everything. He was truly one of the legends that only insiders knew of, because in our industry, it's all about 'who's the face."

Indeed, Domínguez has been credited with blending both the Montecristo No. 1 and No. 2 at H. Upmann, and went on to help the Mendez and Garcia family establish factories in Grand Canary Island and later in Brazil. Set to retire in Miami, Nestor Plasencia was able to bring Domínguez to Estelí to continue his Cuban traditions.

Although Domínguez passed away in 2009 at age 86, Blanco say his lessons carry on, having taught him a valuable understanding of how to continue to expand his knowledge. "It's like martial arts," Blanco explains. "You never stop learning. You continue to expand your horizons. Things change in any industry. Tobacco's now grown in places that were not grown; different strains are developed; different regions are being cultivated. So, if you're not able to change and learn and implement those tobaccos into your cigars, you never adapt, never evolve."

There have been other "hiccups" along the way, Blanco says in understatement. Without a doubt the single biggest impact was felt following Sept. 11, 2001, as both Blanco and his father had remained in active military reserve. First, Cesar was activated and left to serve in Iraq, then David was called to serve in Afghanistan. "We were closed for two years, came back, and we had to start back up on a shoestring," Blanco says, undauntedly. "I never quit at anything in my life, so it was up to me to



>Above and Beyond Heroes is the first new line from Blanco Cigar Company in several years, and the first of what will be four lines total in this series that honors fallen heroes.









> Left to right: Above & Beyond, Blanco's latest new brand launch, is a long-awaited rebranded blend that was used for the company's American Legion cigar. The company's established offerings include Blanco Liga Exclusivo de Familia in two blends; Primos Cigars in long and mixed-filler versions; and the company's highest-rated offering, the full-bodied Blanco Nine, a ligero-heavy, complex Nicaraguan puro.

make it work and I did so."

Blanco lost his entire sales force, all of which were independent reps at the time; a lot of them didn't come back, as they had moved on and filled in their portfolio with other brands.

Retail accounts were often a bit more forgiving. "Once we told people what had happened, why we had disappeared, they were like, 'Oh, thank you very much for your service, and I'll take ten boxes. So that put us back on the establish it's own bonded warehouse and national distribution facility.

Under SCHIP, federal excise taxes on large cigars soared by 700%, which hit importers particularly hard since the tax is due up front.

"That's what really put a hurting on us until 2010," when the company moved to Clearwater, Fla. and set up his warehouse as a customs bond facility, says Blanco. "We were going to leave Chicago anyway because of property says Blanco. "I inadvertently created a service industry within my business model that I hadn't anticipated," and now Blanco Cigars imports and warehouses for about five of those companies.

"I wanted to just make and sell cigars, I just wanted to be a cigar guy," Blanco chuckles about his journey, "but I've had to learn about logistics, business and everything else. You have to be a jack of all trades in an industry like this, unless you can afford to hire every-

> First and foremost I am a blender and this is why I make cigars for so many people; they enjoyed my cigars first and asked me to blend for them. I credit the skills I have acquired as a result of the tutelage I was so lucky to have under a master. —David Blanco, President/CEO

map, but nowhere near what we were doing before, and the momentum that we had gained was lost. So I had to do it all over on a shoestring, basically traveling myself all over The States, scratching and clawing my way back."

The recession in 2008 didn't help matters any, nor did a string of federal regulations that hit the entire industry. But it was the passage of SCHIP in 2009—the State Children's Health Insurance Program and its punishing jump in federal excise tax—that pushed Blanco Cigar Company to its next major change: leaving Chicago for Clearwater, Fla. to taxes, cost of living; it was just nuts." The bonded facility alleviated the federal excise tax burden when merely importing cigars. "We don't have to pay the duty until the product leaves our facility, which means it's sold," Blanco explains. At a current excise rate of 46.5 cents per dollar, that's a significant savings to cash flow.

That savings turned out to be a benefit to a number of clients that Blanco produces cigars for, which number about 12 companies currently.

"So many other small companies that weren't bonded were in the same bind,"



body and their brother to direct it for you." Blanco currently has four people working in his office, but before he had a staff, he had to do everything himself. "I've been able to hand certain responsibilities off to others but that doesn't mean I don't have to have a working knowledge of it myself first."

"There's a lot of guys that are really good in tobacco in this industry, and there's some people that are really good at business in this industry. But there are very few people that are both," says Blanco. "Only through experience and making a lot of mistakes and the luxury of being able to survive 22 years, I think I've got my head and hands around both. Not that I'm an expert at either—anybody that claims to be an expert and knows everything in either one of those categories is lying to you—but I have a very good working knowledge of both.

"First and foremost I am a blender and this is why I make cigars for so many people; they enjoyed my cigars first and asked me to blend for them. I credit the skills I have acquired as a result of the tutelage I was so lucky to have under a master and the Grace of God."

FOCUSING ON BLANCO BRANDS

This year, Blanco says he will be able to step back from all of the partner projects that have dominated his attention in recent years and again focus on Blanco brands, with plans to roll out a total of three new cigars of his own.

"I didn't do that the past couple of years because I was helping other brands I was working with to get on their feet," Blanco explains. "They are young companies, and the first three or four years in business there are a lot of growing pains, so I scaled my business to accommodate them. I've been blending their products, managing their production in our family's factory as well as developing their line extensions. That's why I focused more on them than I did growing the Blanco brands the past few years. This year, I can get back to work growing the Blanco brands and am very excited to do so."

The Blanco brands include the company's highest rated line, Blanco Nine, a complex full-flavored and full-bodied Nicaraguan puro with a ligero-heavy filler blend and a dark, oil Oscuro Corojo wrapper, offered in 6 sizes including a Lancero—Blanco's personal favorite among the company's entire portfolio. The Nine also comes in a JT Limitado (limited edition) that is 100% Ligero. The Blanco Nine has received numerous high ratings including a #1 Cigar of The Year, as voted by consumers, through an online voting system that was worldwide.

The Blanco Liga Exclusiva de Familia features a blend of Nicaraguan fillers and binder, offered in a mild- to medium-bodied Connecticut Shade wrapper or medium- to full-boded Pennsylvania Broadleaf Maduro wrapper in six sizes and boxes of 20 or five-packs. The Liga Exclusiva has also received acclaim with reviewers and consumers alike. Awarded #2 Cigar of The Year in 2018 by consumers around the world via online voting.

Primos Cigars is another brand owned by Blanco. The Estate Selection offers a diverse, complex blend of Honduran, Nicaraguan and Peruvian filler; a Honduran binder; and a choice of Nicaraguan Habano Rosado or Habano Maduro wrappers, offered in six sizes in 20-count boxes and five-packs. This cigar has also received great ratings and reviews to include a "Best Value" award by Cigar Aficionado when it was introduced to the market.

The Primos Classic line is a mixed filler blend of Nicaraguan tobaccos with a Nicaraguan binder and choice of Natural (Connecticut shade), Indonesian Sumatra, or toothy Habano Maduro wrappers, presented in five sizes in bundles of 20 cigars. Using only premium tobaccos from Blanco's other whole leaf blends.





Blanco's first new brand in several years, Above and Beyond, launched in March with the Heroes line, the first release of what will eventually be four lines in all. These patriotic cigars honor fallen heroes-military, police, EMS, fire-who sacrificed their lives for our safety and freedom. It's a medium-strength blend of Nicaraguan and Honduran tobaccos for over 30 years, so I've had the privilege of serving with more heroes than I would like to count. This was our way to honor them all. Giving back to their families and taking care of those families in their absence and time of need."

Another upcoming launch this year is Prince Hall Cigars, honoring Prince Hall, the first free black man to successfully petition for a freemasonry charter, establishing the first African Lodge in the United States In 1787. Hall and 14 other free black men had petitioned unsuccessfully to colonial American Freemasonry, and turned instead to the Grand Lodge of England for their charter. Blanco Cigars will be donating a portion of proceeds of this brand to the Prince Hall Grand Lodges throughout the United States as well for use in their philanthropic endeavors. Blanco is also a 5th generation Mason.

Finally, Blanco will be adding a fourth blend to his Cigar Obsession line called the BG Reserve. "BG stands for Bryan Glynn, who is the owner of cigarobsession.com," explains Blanco. "He's probably the most viewed cigar reviewer, professional consumer, and blogger in the world." Blanco Cigar Company owns the Cigar Obsession cigar brand,

> First and foremost I am a blender, and this is why I make cigars for so many people; they enjoyed my cigars first and asked me to blend for them. I credit the skills I have acquired as a result of the tutelage I was so lucky to have under a master. —David Blanco, President/CEO

with a Habano Rosado wrapper offered in four different box-pressed torpedo sizes. The company is donating 10 percent of proceeds from the sale of this brand to assist surviving families who have lost members that went Above and Beyond, serving in the armed forces and civil service. Blanco says that everything about the design and concept of this cigar holds special meaning to him, such as the "folded flag" secondary band on the head of each cigar. "I was a Deputy Sheriff, Chicago Fire Paramedic Officer and member of the U.S. Army, active guard and reserve

but collaborates with Glynn on marketing the line. The BG Reserve will join the CO 1st Third (Ecuadorian Sumatra), CO 2nd Third (Cameroon), and CO Final Third (Nicaraguan Habano)—currently offered in five-packs and in the near future in 20-count boxes, as well as the and available in four sizes in each blend.

Even after 30 years of military service, Blanco continues as an active reserve soldier, both on ground and airborne—and is "still jumping out of planes," he notes. Last June, he jumped during the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the D-Day Normandy invasion, and then spent two weeks touring retail stores in the Netherlands and Belgian. Last September, he missed the first days of the Intertabac Trade Fair in Dortmund, Germany to jump in the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden, the massive WWII airborne and land operation to free Dutch cities from German control. He then joined the trade fair for the rest of the event.

"I try to do as much of that as possible," says Blanco of his desire to continue balancing work and military service. "I'll serve my country for as long as I can. I see it not only as an obligation but an honor and privilege. Generations of my family were also involved in one way or another in the military and military service is a big part of who our family is." Cigars are the other part of who we are.

Blanco says he hopes that everyone who tries a Blanco Cigar enjoys it, and with so many different profiles to choose from, there's a style to match every consumer preference. The company continues to expand its distribution in the United States as well as internationally, having been active in the European market for over a decade and setting sights on building the brand's presence on every continent. In fact, Blanco had originally planned to be in Asia in April, but the pandemic has put all of his business travel on hold for now, including tours he hosts for retail and distribution partners in Nicaragua.

Having built his company up from scratch twice, Blanco is truly grateful for all of the industry support the brand and his family have earned over the past 22 years. "Thank you to all of our distribution and retail partners as well as consumers that have helped our combat veteran, family-owned and family-operated business continue to thrive and grow, through the lean years and beyond," conclude Blanco. "We will continue to work hard to bring everyone great cigars at an even greater value and are thankful for all the support. Stay smoky!"

Blanco Cigar Company, 6399 142nd Avenue North, Suite 117, Clearwater, Fla. 33760, Tel: (727) 535-1639, Email: customerservice@blancocigars.com, Web: blancocigars.com.

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Dominican Republic:

Procigar Festival 2020— Just in the Knick of Time

Manufacturers in "cigar country" were fortunate to have been just ahead of the more stringent global travel disruptions that were widespread shortly after this year's 13th annual festival. > FRANK SELTZER

Festival was much like previous years, yet it also was different. Now in its 13th year, the festival celebrates the art of cigar making in the Dominican Republic. With each passing year, the festival has grown in size, somewhat limited by the numbers the organization allows. The premise has always been to not let the celebration get too big, lest attendees would not get the chance to really interact and get to know the cigar makers.

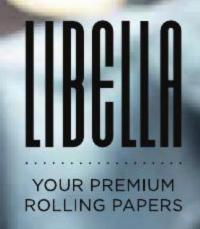
The Procigar organization was created in the 1990s just as the cigar boom was gaining speed. The group came about mainly for self-protection as all kinds of people descended on the Dominican Republic to try to make cigars during the boom. The existing manufacturers banded together to help make certain that everything from rollers to cellophane was available. In 2008, the members of Procigar decided to hold an annual festival so attendees could intimately experience Cigar Country and to promote the cigar lifestyle with the best of the best.

This year, paid attendance was limited to 350, and it began on Sunday February 16th at Casa de Campo in La Romana.

The first difference for this year was the exclusion on any Chinese attendees. With the COVID-19 virus on everyone's mind and President Trump's travel ban from China in place, the organizers decided it was best that no Chinese travelers be allowed to attend for fear of infections.

The festival kicked off in a relaxed manner with a dinner at Dye Fore Terrace, which overlooks one of Pete Dye's fabulous golf courses of the same name at the resort. Monday began with just hanging out at the luxury hotel. Some played golf, others went to the beach or sailing. That afternoon, the *Grupo de Maestros* from Altadis U.S.A. took participants through a sampling of leaf grades as to how they combine for the smoking experience.

Tuesday was a tour of the enormous Tabacalera de Garcia factory. Owned by Altadis U.S.A., the factory is the world's largest, clocking in at nearly 700,000 square feet and employing about 5,000 workers. The factory produces about 40 million premium cigars and also has a machine-made operation which operates 24-hours-a-day, making a billion mass market cigars yearly.



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> The mood of this year was light and fun, but underneath there was room for concern by the cigar makers. 2019 was not a banner year for the Dominican Republic, and some of the factories had to lay off workers because demand was down.

After the tour, participants boarded buses for the multi-hour ride north to Santiago, the true capital of what's called Cigar Country. Every attendee received a box of cigars in their welcome pack, along with a shirt, hat, lighter, and cutter among other things. At Tuesday's welcome reception, even more cigars were handed out. In fact, every night of the event gives out another box of cigars with one cigar from each of the 11 member companies. This is in addition to the cigars given out on the tours during the day.

Wednesday saw the beginning of the tours around Santiago, visits to the fields of Montecristo, Davidoff, Quesada, and General, with factory tours of La Flor Dominicana, De Los Reyes, Tabacalera La Alianza, and La Aurora. After the tours, participants were invited to compete in a new smoking challenge. Previous years the smoking contest focused on slow smoking. This time, the International Association of Cigar Sommeliers had smokers compete among a strict set of rules that did not include smoking extremely slowly. Cigars had to be lit by cedar strips (you had three) off a candle and no inhaling, as you would light a cigar to give to someone else. Then, contestants were judged on long ash, overall smoking style, and finally pairings with each third of the cigar. I guess all my years finally paid off in that I won the contest, which includes a Master Cigar Sommelier course next year.

That night, the welcome dinner featured a fabulous layout with traditional foods at a new location—the Parque Central, which provided more room than in years past.

On Thursday, there were more tours of factories and a special trip down to Chateau de la Fuente, home to the Cigar

Family Foundation school and House of Dreams. That night, over 800 people attended the famous "white night" atop the Monumento a los Heroes de la Restauracion, overlooking Santiago.

On Friday, there were no tours; instead Procigar tried something new—the First Edition Procigar Members Field Day. All week long, attendees were trying to figure out what this was, to no avail. Buses were boarded and all 350 participants found themselves in the middle of one of La Flor Dominicana's tobacco fields. A section of the field had not been planted and in its place was a big tent complete with tables, drinks, food, and music.

In addition, around the perimeter were all the members of Procigar, with cigars of course. According to the organizers, due to the growth of the festival, from under 200 people in early years to 350 now, it was felt that attendees did not really get the chance to get to know and talk with the different cigarmakers. At the beginning when it was more intimate, it was possible to sit and have lunch and dinner with the members. One year, a dinner was even held in each of the member's homes. This year's Friday field day gave plenty of time for anyone to walk up to Nirka Reyes of De Los Reyes; Manuel Quesada of Quesada Cigars; Eladio Diaz of Davidoff; Abe Flores of PDR Cigars; Guillermo Leon or Manuel Inoa of La Aurora; Yuri Guillen of General Cigar; Litto and Tony Gomez of La Flor Dominicana; Pedro Ventura of Tabacalera de Garcia; Ernesto Perez Carrillo of Tabacalera Alianza; Jochy Blanco of Tabacalera Palma; Eric Newman of J.C. Newman and Arturo Fuente; or Henke Kelner, the man who built Davidoff in the Dominican Republic and now the president of Procigar. Everyone had cigars so you could smoke with them and ask them any questions. Litto Gomez was the toughest to try to talk

> In 2018, the big catalogs bought heavily, and last year they still had inventory so buying was lighter. The factories felt this year was going to be much better and were in the process of hiring more rollers back to increase production. The Covid virus was not much of a threat at that time...











to since it was his farm and he had his horse there and spent time on his mount.

The mood this year was light and fun, but underneath there was room for concern by the cigar makers. 2019 was not a banner year for the Dominican Republic, and some of the factories had to lay off workers because demand was down. In 2018, the big catalogs bought heavily and last year they still had inventory, so buying was lighter. The factories felt this year was going to be much better and were in the process of hiring more rollers back to increase production. But there was still concern about what the FDA might do in the United States. The coronavirus disease was not much of a threat at that time, but soon it would impact production as factories across the country were forced to close as the virus spread, and many cigar stores in the U.S. were forced to close as well.

But with those obstacles, it did not dampen the enthusiasm at Procigar. Friday night was the final part of the event with the annual gala at Centro Español and the final charity auction. In addition to the charities from previous years-Voluntariado Jesus con los Ninos for the children and Sociedad San Vicente de Paul for the

elderly—a special charity called a Home for My Family was set up by Procigar itself. The idea is to help the most deserving artisans from the factories and fields in the Dominican Republic by building them a home. A moving video showed a single mother from La Aurora being given her own home for her family. Bidding on the one-of-a-kind items was spirited, and overall the auction raised over \$200,000 for the three charities. A good night indeed.

The Procigar 2021 Festival will be held February 21-26, 2021. Details and registration information will be posted at procigar.org once available.



Message from the Mohawks

How a tribe in Upstate New York is capturing the appeal of traditional Native America in an all natural cigarette made by indigenous workers. >BY CHRISTOPHER BICKERS

ou might say the Mohawks are sending a "Signal." And the signal is there is a cigarette coming out of the north country now that contains an all-natural tobacco blend and is made largely by Native Americans.

Way up north in upstate New York so far north that a few steps the wrong way will put you in Canada—-you will find Ohserase Manufacturing, a family-owned and operated tobacco products manufacturing company and members of the legendary Native American tribe, the Mohawks.

They may be on the verge of winning a significant place in the American cigarette market, thanks to a new marketing push on Ohseraseg's flagship brand, appropriately called Signal. The brand and company were both launched in 2006, but the presentation has been completely revamped in the last year, and you can see those advances most clearly in the packaging for Signal cigarettes.

SUBSTANTIAL REDESIGN

The packaging before had what you might call a generic look and just didn't convey the brands' best attributes: its all-natural blend, containing only tobacco and water, and the fact that the product is Native American-made.

"The redesign focused on celebrating our heritage of keeping the product



> Left: Ohserase' redesign of its Signal packaging features a heroic-looking Mohawk brave sending a fiery signal on the front of its cigarette pack, while a placard celebrating Native American traditions now appears on the back. Around the tops is a stylized rendition of Mohawk beadwork. Above: Members of the Mohawk tribe, like Misty Swamp (shown here doing quality control on Signal cigarettes), play an important part in operating the Ohserase factory.

pure from additives and other chemicals while showcasing our Native American roots," says Justin Tarbell, executive vice president of strategy and business development at Tarbell Management Group, the family business that owns Ohserase Manufacturing among other holdings.

There is now a Mohawk brave on the front of each pack holding a flaming ember as if to signal his tribesmen. The top of each pack has been decorated with a colorful stylized representation of beadwork of the sort that Mohawks are famous for. There are Mohawk words printed under the lid. For instance, under the lid of the pack I just opened, I found oh yoo gwa, which means tobacco.

But the attribute that defines what the Tarbells are trying to accomplish is the seal on the lid, says Justin. It guarantees that the cigarettes inside use only all-natural tobacco and is believed to be the only cigarette brand in the country with a guaranteed like this.

And a perspective on Native American tobacco use is given in a placard on the back of each pack. It says:



Premium Value Blend Pipe Tobacco



The Name Everyone Knows The Brand Everyone Trusts!

Give your customer's what they've been longing for; Quality Value Blend Pipe Tobacco at an Affordable Price!

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> Customers make their purchases at the original Bear's Den, once a two-pump gas station but now a modern convenience store with gasoline.

Honoring Tradition With True Tobacco. For generations, tobacco has played a sacred role in Native American cultures. Experience our Mohawk-made craft cigarettes that are blended with only All natural premium leaf and water. Join the Tribe at www.signaltobacco.com. Blended With Only Tobacco & Water.

not exactly crowded. Two of Signal's competitors are Native American Spirit (from Reynolds American International) and Nat Sherman International's Nat's (from Altria). Tarbell notes that Signal possesses strong competitive points with these two, primarily an affordable price, products in 100mm formats, and a prod-

>For over 400 years, tobacco has had an important part in Iroqubis culture. Tobacco has long been a domestic plant grown in small gardens within the village area which the men took primary responsibility for raising.

—Justin Tarbell, Ohserase Manufacturing

Sales of Signal allow Ohserase to support Native American charities across the country. "It takes a portion of every sale to help under-served and disadvantaged Native American communities around the country, and this is by far our most rewarding work," says Tarbell. "It is why Signal is so special to us."

The all natural cigarette category is

uct made by true Native Americans.

Besides cigarettes, the Signal brand includes filtered cigars and pipe tobacco. They now feature the same design changes as Signal cigarettes. "These categories cater to a different consumer base, but we wanted to keep the messaging similar by showcasing the heritage that makes this brand unique," Tarbell said. "We've



Customers can get premium coffee and baked items at Tim Horton's Café and Bake Shop, in a corner of the Bear's Den.

completely re-imagined what a cigarette pack can be."

Ohserase also sells Dean's filtered cigars and Dean's and Farmers' Gold pipe tobacco. Those two brands were acquired from M&R Holdings of Pink Hill, N.C., in 2017.

RELATIVELY NEW

By American tobacco standards, Ohserase (the "r" is pronounced as an "l") is a relatively young tobacco company, although its parent company had already been in existence for several years producing other products and services.

In 2006, the company added tobacco products to its mix. "We have carefully combined the finest tobaccos, high quality materials, state-of-the-art manufacturing equipment, and knowledgeable staff to create a world-class product for you to enjoy," says Tarbell.

Rest assured, the Tarbells—Mohawks themselves-are well familiar with the role that tobacco played in Native American life in the past.

For over 400 years, tobacco has had an important part in Iroquois culture, says Tarbell. "Tobacco has long been a domestic plant grown in small gardens within the village area which the men took primary responsibility for raising. Its principal use was as a ceremonial offering thrown into the fire. The rising smoke carried messages of thanksgiving and other "good thoughts" to the Creator."

"In addition to its religious uses, men smoked tobacco in their pipes," he said. "It is said that good thoughts came while smoking and therefore was frequently used when important matters were to be discussed and decided."

The first member of the family to get into the business was Theresa "Bear", matriarch of the Tarbell family, who started The Bear's Den Trading Post on the Mohawk reservation in 1953 with two gas pumps and a small Native gift shop. "This was the time when the Saint Lawrence Seaway was being completed," Justin Tarbell says. "A lot of workers were coming in then."

Eli, Justin's father, established two new convenience stores, adding diesel fuel and a family-style restaurant to the main retail store and added diesel fuel and a family-style restaurant to the main retail store. He also focused on the brand's customer service, another attribute that runs through the Tarbells' various businesses in the present day. The name Ohserase is Eli's Mohawk name, and means "new day."

In 2006, Justin-with his brother Brandon—entered into the tobacco business; since then Ohserase has grown into a modern 80,000 sq. ft. facility staffed by members of the Mohawk tribe.

Native American brands were gaining market share 10 years ago, the Wall Street Journal wrote in a 2011 article on Ohserase. But it is very difficult to estimate the size of the category, it said.

"Cigarette sales have long been part of the economic engines of U.S. tribal reservations, along with casinos and tax-free gasoline sales," said WSJ. "The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's land here, which runs about six miles long and six miles wide, is sprinkled with low-slung smoke shops and convenience stores."

WHO ARE THE MOHAWKS?

Now remembered largely for a hair style that involved shaving the sides of the head, the Mohawk tribe was one of many tribes that were part of the Iroquois Confederation and inhabited the area around the Great Lakes and parts of what is now Canada and the state of New York. They were considered the keepers of the Eastern Door, or borders, protecting the Iroquois nation from invasions from that direction. In their course of survival, the Mohawk tribe allied with the Dutch in the seventeenth century and later became allies of the English crown. The Mohawk tribe fought mostly against the United







> Top left: A worker services a cigarette manufacturing machine. Top right: Loading cases of cigarettes for transportation. Above: Signal products stretch up to the ceiling in the staging area in the factory.

States in the Revolutionary War. After the Revolutionary War...they moved north into present-day Canada and became mercenaries of the British army.

Today, descendants of the Mohawk tribe can be found in southeastern Canada and parts of New York. Though many have integrated into American and Canadian societies, many still live on reservations. Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe at the Saint Regis Reservation is the largest Mohawk organization and is governed by their own elected officials, which continue to be recognized by the United States federal government to this day. These elected officials are still known as chiefs and are independently elected by their tribe to represent the tribe in all dealings with the federal government.

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe is located in the St. Lawrence River Valley in northern New York and Canada. This area-which is called Akwesasne, a Mohawk word for 'land where the partridge drums'—is literally bisected by St. Lawrence River and the United States-Canada Border. The St. Regis Mohawk Reservation is comprised of twelve square miles and is located at Akwesasne.

Ohserase Manufacturing LLC, 26 Eagle Drive, PO Box 1221, Akwesasne, NY 13655, Toll-free: (888) 631-4039, Email: customerservice@ohserase.com.



2020 Tobacco Plus Expo:

Exhibitors Reshape Tradeshow Landscape

TPE continues to grow, adding a surge of premium cigar makers some who won't be at PCA 2020. >BY FRANK SELTZER

The first trade show of the year is complete, and judging from observations and comments it was a huge success. The Tobacco Plus Expo (TPE) ran from January 29–31 in Las Vegas at the Las Vegas Convention Center. This was the 16th annual TPE show, which is part of Kretek International and its wholesale division, Phillips and King.

The show began with a big party for all the attendees and opened with a keynote talk by basketball legend and cigar maker Karl Malone. The show had the feel of an intimate cigar program, nowhere near the scope of the PCA (IPCPR).

In the past, TPE had a small premium cigar component, but all of that changed last year when Villiger became the first manufacturer to announce it was abandoning last year's IPCPR show in favor of this year's TPE. Rene Casteñeda—the president of Villiger Cigars North America—said his move was strictly business. "We realized that year by year, the cost of the IPCPR and now the PCA was getting higher and higher. I was doing the analysis based on the investment for the show and we decided that the last two years when we were at the show to measure the real amount of business we were writing while we were on the show floor and it didn't add up."

Villiger had a decent presence at IPCPR/PCA but nowhere near that of the "big boys"—Swisher-Drew Estate, Altadis, General, and Davidoff-who





announced in January that they too were not going to attend the PCA show this summer. Kretek also decided to pull out of the summer show as well. As a result of these decisions it put more focus onto TPE and its premium cigar showcase.

While exact figures are not available, roughly a third of the floor space was dedicated to premium cigars. The remainder of the show was taken up with CBD products, and some vape, although there were fewer vape options than previous years.

Some of the premium manufacturers were used to earlier years when a lot of c-store operators came to the show and were interested in value products. In speaking with the exhibitors, they were surprised at the number of tobacconists at the TPE, with many saying they wrote good sized orders and opened new accounts. They said they were seeing people who did not attend the summer shows in the past. Part of that may be due to the TPE pushing for





retailers to come to the show by adding incentives like two free hotel room nights, a gift card to help offset travel costs, and a free badge to the show making it more affordable.

On the second night, TPE gave out awards for best Dominican cigar (Fuente Hemmingway Untold Story), Nicaraguan cigar (Oliva Serie V Melanio), Honduran cigar (Rocky Patel The Edge Sumatra), Boutique Cigar of the year (Room 101 Doomsayer), the Legacy award (Carlito Fuente), Entrepreneur of the Year (Pete Johnson) and Woman of the Year (Janine Perdomo).

For years there has been a debate about the timing of the IPCPR/PCA show in the summer. The organization had wanted the manufacturers to debut products and deals at the show, but that meant holding off on new products until June/July, as opposed to starting in January with the TPE. The timing of TPE helps the manufacturers.

Says Joe Gro of Drew Estate, which is not exhibiting at the 2020 PCA show, "You are going to see more releases throughout the year. It is going to be more even-keel and a decent number of the releases this summer. It will be more even. This does smooth out the business as well. It has been lumpy in the past. You are tracking all year and then every June and July you have one big number and that can make or break the year. We've always wanted for revenue and cash flow purposes to start smoothing that out."



Rafael Nodal from Altadis agrees. "As a company, Altadis is very dedicated to our retailers and we have always looked for ways to support them and our brands and elevate the experience of the consumers. So we have different ways where we work with them at different levels. One is to bring in the best possible cigar and to do events to elevate the experience for the consumer. And we will not be holding out releases for the show. We have always done releases throughout the year so we will continue with that pattern."

At TPE, Altadis presented the new Romeo y Julieta Reserva Real Nicaragua. Adds Nodal, "Our original Reserva Real is a Dominican blend with Nicaragua and Dominican Republic tobaccos and it comes with an Ecuadorian Connecticut wrapper. For the Nicaraguan version we made a cigar with 100 percent Nicaraguan tobacco with a little bit more complexity and flavor. We wanted to keep within the Reserva Real DNA and with this Nicaraguan version we add a bit more flavor and complexity."

Drew Estate launched the Undercrown Corona Pequena in both Maduro and Shade. The new petit corona is a 4" x44 and is the same blend as the regular Undercrowns. The idea is that this is a shorter smoke for cold winter or hot summer days. The price point is \$5.50 in boxes of 32. The company also unveiled its special limited Year of the Rat Liga Privada. According to Gro, the cigars

will only be available to Drew Diplomat accounts that hold special events. The event-only cigar will be limited to four boxes per store. The Year of the Rat will retail for \$15.97.

For Villiger, the company launched two Villiger do Brazil cigars. According to Casteñeda, "This is a labor of love for Mr. Villiger because he loves Brazilian tobacco and has a factory there. The first tobaccos the company purchased when it started in 1888 were Brazilian. We grow tobacco in Brazil, and the first handmade factory for Villiger is in Brazil. Both cigars are Brazilian puros—one of them Brazilian Connecticut wrapper, it is a Connecticut seed grown in Brazil and the maduro is Arapiraca. Both cigars are different. The natural is on the creamy side, mild to medium with complexity. The maduro has a lot of flavor. They come in boxes of five cigars."

As for retailers coming to the show, Kirk Kendall, owner of Twins Smoke Shop and Lounge and the 7-20-4 brand of cigars, came this year as a store owner. "I didn't know what to expect when I got here and I was pleasantly surprised, with a substantial amount of premium cigar manufacturers and distributors. There were some unique opportunities to see new products and new accessories and to get to everybody in the room. It feels like the old RTDA and I look forward to being here next year and maybe display."

TPE21 is scheduled for January 27-29, 2021. Visit tobaccoplusexpo.com.

Protecting Cigars

HERRERA ESTELI SEW ESTATE

The Cigar Association of America continues its decadeslong position as lead industry lobbyist protecting cigars from unreasonable regulation. > BY CRAIG WILLIAMSON

s the cigar industry's leading trade association, CAA has long acted to protect the cigar industry from unreasonable regulation that threatens the ability of manufacturers of all types of cigars to market and sell their products to adult consumers. While in the first instance this in-

and regulators at all levels of government, it sometimes means going to court.

volves engagement with legislators

When that becomes necessary, CAA and its member companies have devoted significant resources to such efforts. For example, CAA has twice led the industry in successfully challenging local ordinances that would have had a devastating impact on the industry, in both instances taking the cases to the respective state supreme courts to get a favorable decision. In Chicago, the city passed a dramatic tax increase on cigars, in contravention of Illinois state law.

CAA led a challenge to the ordinance that resulted in the Illinois Supreme declaring the ordinance unconstitutional. In Philadelphia, CAA similarly led a challenge to a local ordinance that would have forced the closure of many, if not all, stores in the city selling cigars, including an iconic retail tobacconist located in the heart of the city. In both cases, CAA and its members provided significant funding, in defense of the entire industry. CAA has also funded other local level lawsuits, on behalf and in support of the entire cigar industry.

At the federal level, with passage of the tobacco buyout, cigar companies began paying into a fund to compensate US farmers for the decreased use of domestic tobacco. A leading cigarette manufacturer sued the federal government, seeking to change the methodology used to calculate fees under the buyout; such a change would have shifted tens of millions of dollars away from cigarettes and onto cigars. CAA fought to oppose the change, joined the lawsuit,

> and was instrumental defeating the effort at the trial court lev-

> > el, a decision that was affirmed on appeal.

With passage in 2009 of the Tobacco Control Act, CAA and its members began to educate FDA and the Congress on the unique nature of cigars and the cigar industry, pointing out the devastating impact overreaching regulation would have on all segments of the industry. CAA first engaged with FDA in 2011, explaining how very different cigars are from the products Congress determined were in need of

immediate regulation.

In April 2014, when FDA first proposed a Deeming Rule that would regulate cigars and all other tobacco products, CAA took the lead in drafting comments to FDA. The comments demonstrated the clear need for cigars to be treated independently from other tobacco products, that FDA could not and should use a "one size fits all" approach to regulating tobacco products, and making very clear CAA's view that premium cigars should be exempt from regulation.

With issuance of the Final Deeming Rule in May 2016, CAA took the lead in galvanizing the industry and preparing for litigation to challenge FDA's draconian and heavy-handed approach to cigar regulation. That litigation, filed along with IPCPR and CRA, while ongoing, has already paid dramatic dividends. Among other things, it has resulted in FDA extending without date the requirement that the industry conduct crushingly expensive HPHC testing and led a court to conclude that FDA-mandated health warnings could not be imposed, at least for premium cigars.

CAA has also submitted numerous and extensive comments on other proposals by FDA, supported by detailed expert reports. For example, when FDA opened a docket asking for comments on the appropriate regulatory treatment of premium cigars, including whether and how premium cigars should be regulated, CAA submitted comments making a full-throated argument for exemption. Similarly, when FDA issued a proposed rule on substantial equivalence reports, CAA's comments outlined a thoughtful path forward for certain cigars while again arguing that premium cigars should be fully exempt from the premarket review requirements.

Not surprisingly, all of these efforts, while critical to the survival and prosperity of the entire cigar industry, have been expensive. At the state level, CAA has spent millions of dollars engaging with regulators and legislators in an effort to defeat onerous regulation and avoid litigation. When litigation becomes necessary, CAA and its members provide the funding: the Chicago, Philadelphia, and tobacco buyout lawsuits alone cost CAA well over \$1 million. In connection with the fight against FDA regulation, since 2014, CAA has spent over \$3 million. This is in addition to what some of its members spend on their own in-house and outside counsel.

CAA has always done what it takes to defend the entire cigar industry, and is fortunate to have members willing to commit financial resources to the effort. Be assured that in the days, months, and years ahead, CAA will remain steadfast in its commitment to the needs of the entire industry.

Craig Williamson is president of the Cigar Association of America, Tel: (202) 223-8204, Web: cigarassociation.org.

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The ABCs of FDA

Tobacco Product Pre-Market Applications

The industry stares down the final countdown to one of the most daunting FDA regulations to date. >BY THOMAS BRIANT

n 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (TCA) autho-istration to regulate cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and roll-your-own tobacco. This federal law required cigarettes, smokeless and RYO tobacco introduced into the marketplace after February 15, 2007 to receive marketing authorization from the FDA prior to being offered for sale.

Then, this same marketing authorization requirement was later extended by the FDA to cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapor products, hookah, and alternative nicotine products-referred to as "deemed" products—effective August 8, 2016.

As described below, in the coming months FDA will be requiring manufacturers of deemed tobacco products (that is, all products other than cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and roll-your-own) to file marketing authorization requests by September 9, 2020 or be subject to FDA enforcement. Note that the original filing deadline was May 12, 2020, but the FDA obtained court permission to extend the

deadline by 120 days due to the impact of the Coronavirus.

The FDA is very limited in what information it can disclose regarding application status. Some manufacturers have already sent out communications to their retail and wholesale customers indicating that they are complying with the market authorization filing requirements for their particular family and inquiring whether market applications have been or will be filed for the company's products.

FDA's requirements for market authorization applications depends on various factors, including date of product availability in the marketplace. This article is an in-depth review of the FDA's marketing authorization process that will affect a significant number of tobacco products currently on the market.

MARKETING AUTHORIZATION SUBMISSIONS

All tobacco products introduced into the market after February 15, 2007 must receive FDA authorization. Manufacturers satisfy the marketing authorization requirement primarily through one of two product authorization pathways.

The first type of marketing authorization pathway is known as a Substantial Equivalence report or "SE." In this pathway, a manufacturer must demonstrate that a new product has the same characteristics as a "predicate" product (either a grandfathered product that was already on the market as of February 15, 2007, or a product that has previously received an SE marketing authorization), or that the new product does not raise different questions of public health.

This approach is most common with changes to existing combustible or moist smokeless tobacco products.

> In the absence of a communication from a manufacturer, retailers and wholesalers should consider contacting manufacturers directly and inquiring whether market applications have been or will be filed for the company's products.

of products. These communications can serve as confirmation that those products may remain on the market during the FDA review process. In the absence of a communication from a manufacturer, retailers and wholesalers should consider contacting manufacturers directly The second kind of marketing authorization submission is called a Pre-Market Tobacco Application or "PMTA." The FDA's PMTA review, among other things, evaluates the product's risk to the individual user and possible impact to the population, considering both

tobacco users and non-users. A product will be granted a PMTA marketing authorization order by the FDA if the agency finds that marketing of the new product is "appropriate for the protection of the public health."

A PMTA will be most common among new product categories such as electronic cigarettes, e-vapor, hookah, nicotine gels and novel oral alternative nicotine tobacco products.

PMTA CONTENT & REVIEW PROCESS

A PMTA is an extensive submission that the FDA subjects to a thorough review process. To be complete, a PMTA needs to include, among other things, the following information and documentation:

- A full statement of the ingredients, additives and properties of the tobacco product;
- Published reports from studies and investigations that show the health risks of the tobacco product and whether the tobacco product presents less risk than other tobacco products;
- Clinical human study outcomes based on the use of the tobacco product; and
- A full description of the methods used in, and the facilities and controls used for, the manufacturing, processing, and packing of the tobacco product.

In general, the FDA follows a threestep PMTA review process. At each juncture, the agency can reject a PMTA.

- First, upon submission of a PMTA, the FDA conducts an administrative review to verify that the tobacco product falls under the FDA's jurisdiction and confirms that the required information accompanies the application. At this point, the FDA may issue either a letter to accept a PMTA or a letter to "refuse to accept" an application.
- Second, the agency conducts a preliminary scientific review to ensure the application contains the required

documentation, research, and reports to qualify for a substantive review. If the required documentation is submitted, the FDA issues a Letter of Filing to the manufacturer. At this point, the FDA may also "refuse to file" an application.

- Third, the FDA conducts a substantive review of the application and scientif-
- Products which did so are referred to as "provisional" and may continue to be marketed unless FDA issues an order otherwise.
- New cigarette, smokeless and RYO products introduced after March 22, 2011 must receive a marketing order from the FDA prior to being offered for sale.
- >To be clear: The September 9, 2020 deadline applies to all new (non-grandfathered) deemed tobacco products introduced after February 15, 2007 including cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapor products, hookah products, nicotine gels and alternative nicotine products.

ic research. Following this, the FDA issues a PMTA Marketing Approval Order authorizing the sale of the tobacco product or a No Marketing Order denying the sale of the product. If the FDA issues a No Marketing Order for a tobacco product, the product is "misbranded" and must be removed from the market.

MARKET AUTHORIZATION ENFORCEMENT

FDA enforcement of the marketing authorization requirement varies based on product type and date of availability in the market. In general:

- All tobacco products on the market on or before February 15, 2007 are "grandfathered" and exempt from the premarket authorization requirement. This means that manufacturers are not required to submit SE or PMTA applications for grandfathered products to remain on the market, but the products must comply with all other FDA tobacco regulations.
- New cigarettes, smokeless and RYO products introduced between February 15, 2007 and March 22, 2011 were required to file marketing authorization submissions by March 22, 2011.

The FDA previously extended timelines to submit tobacco product review applications for "deemed" products, including cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapor products, hookah, alternative nicotine products, and heated tobacco products introduced between February 15, 2007 and August 8, 2016.

Based on a recent court order, manufacturers of these products must now file SE or PMTA marketing authorization requests by September 9, 2020. FDA may allow these products to remain on the market for up to one year, or potentially even longer, during the application review period.

To be clear: The September 9, 2020 deadline applies to all new (non-grandfathered) deemed tobacco products introduced after February 15, 2007 including cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapor products, hookah products, nicotine gels and alternative nicotine products.

This can be achieved through either the SE or PMTA pathway. In fact, many brands of cigars, pipe tobacco and some of the other deemed tobacco products are likely to be substantially similar to a tobacco product that was already on the market as of February 15, 2007. In those cases, manufacturers can file SEs with the FDA by September 9, 2020. At the same time, there were no electronic cigarette, vapor, or alternative nicotine products on the market as of February 15, 2007, which means that there is no substantially similar product to rely on to file a SE. For all of those products, manufacturers are required to file PMTAs with the FDA by the September 9th deadline.

It is important to know that one SE or PMTA application is required per product SKU or per brand family, which is the reason why such a high number of pre-market applications will likely be filed.

"Deemed" products including cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapor products, hookah, alternative nicotine products, and heated tobacco products introduced to the market after August 8, 2016 must receive a marketing order from the FDA prior to being offered for sale.

While the FDA also regulates what are known as tobacco product "components" such as cigarette rolling papers, rolling tubes, and traditional tobacco pipes, these products are not "made or derived from tobacco" and are not subject to the pre-market application filing requirements.

UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS OF PRODUCT APPLICATIONS

As you can see, some products currently on the market may not be authorized to be sold post September 9th if the manufacturers of those new, deemed products do not submit a market authorization application.

The process will also continue to unfold. As outlined above, some products for which an application is submitted may receive "Refuse to Accept," "Refuse to File," or "No Marketing Order" determinations. If at any point the applicant receives one of these negative determinations, the FDA considers the product "misbranded" and it cannot be legally sold. Manufacturers will need to work with the agency to comply with the law and remove the products

from the market.

Under federal law, the FDA is, in general, prohibited from disclosing information about pending market authorization applications or even disclosing for which products applications have been submitted. Indeed, the FDA has already indicated that it will not publish a list of those SE or PMTA applications that have been accepted for review by the agency or status updates on a product's review progress.

This means that retailers and wholesalers will need to rely on manufacturers to inform them of whether they have submitted timely applications or have received a negative decision at any point in the process.

Thomas Briant is executive director of the National Association of Tobacco Outlets (NATO), Toll-free: (866) 869-8888, Web: www.natocentral.org.



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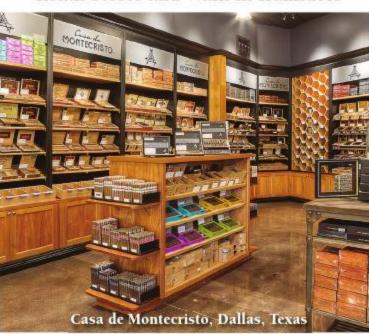
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Leap Vapor Adjusts Flavor Offerings

E-Alternative Solutions (EAS), a sister company to Jacksonville-based Swisher International, has adjusted its portfolio of Leap Pods following the Food and Drug Administration's ban of all non-menthol flavors in cartridge-based vaping systems in January. Leap Pods are the company's refills for its Leap vaping device.

While all fruit-based flavors have been dropped, EAS has expanded the styles and variety of permitted tobacco

flavors. The current lineup of tobacco flavors includes **Carolina Tobacco** ("smooth and unmistakably Southern"), **Georgia Tobacco** ("warm roasted flavor with home-grown spirit"), **Kentucky Tobacco** ("distinct Burley flavor with classic bluegrass finish"), and **Rough-Cut Tobacco** ("rich, robust taste with fire-cured finish"), while menthol flavors include **Kentucky Menthol** ("warm Burley flavor with cool finish") and **Menthol** ("invigorating menthol flavor with crisp, cool finish").

Each Pod contains 1.5mL of e-liquid formulated with nicotine salts, available in the original 4.8% nicotine level (48mg) as well as a reduced 2.4% nicotine level



WARNING: This product contains nicotine. Nicotine is an addictive chemical. (24mg). The disposable Pods also contain the system's atomizer—the heating element that vaporizes the e-liquid inside—so atomizer degradation is never an issue. Suggested retail price for a two-pack of Leap Pods is \$7.99.

The current flavor lineup of the **Leap Go** disposable e-Cigarette line includes five flavors: Citrus Menthol, the newest addition, as well as Cool Mint, Fresh Mango, Mixed Berry, and Smooth Tobacco, all in 5% nicotine levels. A single Leap Go has a suggested retail price of \$7.99 **E-Alternative Solutions LLC (EAS)**, Darien, Conn., Tel: (805) 291-4623, Email: support@ ealternativesolutions.com, Web: ealternativesolutions.com.

Brewed Awakenings Eliquid from Caribbean Cloud

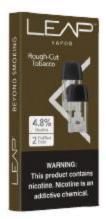
Caribbean Cloud Company (CCC) was established in 2016 on a mission to create more flavorful eliquids. The company prides itself on "tackling niche profiles and relentlessly perfecting them." Among the company's dozens of offerings is its Brewed Awakening line. "We have taken time in crafting the best cider, chai, and coffee flavors you will find," the company explains.

Brewed Awakening Classic is the company's classic cappuccino style flavor consisting of a caramel blast followed by a bold coffee finish with hazelnut and cream undertones; Brewed Awakening Apple Cider is a fall classic: apple cider topped with a caramel drizzle and a brown sugar sprin-

kle; Brewed Awakening Vanilla Chai Tea is "perfectly steeped" and blended with vanilla and cinnamon; and Brewed Awakening Pumpkin Spice, a limited edition seasonal variate of Brewed Awakening Classic Coffee with a seasonal twist.

Each is offered in 6mg, 3mg, or 0mg nicotine levels in 100ml (\$24.99 retail) or 60ml (\$17.99 retail) drip-top bottles presented in full-color outer carton, as well as 30ml Salt Nicotine formulations (\$17.99 retail).

Caribbean Cloud Co., Beachwood, N.J., Web: caribbeancloudcompany.com.





Bantam Eliquids from Pyxus

Bantam artisanal flavors from Pyxus International are built from scratch using only high-quality ingredients, delivering smooth and clean-tasting e-liquids. Offering "flavors backed by science," Bantam e-liquids are developed in certified clean rooms with rigid testing and analysis, and produced by flavorists and chemists with over 60 years of combined experience.

Each batch is tested for quality, and with the Sentrism track and trace system, consumers can use the batch number on each bottle to get transparency to the quality of ingredients.

Bantam offers both traditional e-juice (6mg, 3mg, and 0mg nicotine levels in 60ml bottles) as well as nic salts (36mg and 48mg nicotine levels in 30ml bottles) that utilize the company's proprietary PyriSalt, a premium nicotine salt with an optimized balance of organic acid and USP-verified nicotine, designed to deliver ultrasmooth flavor with no harshness.

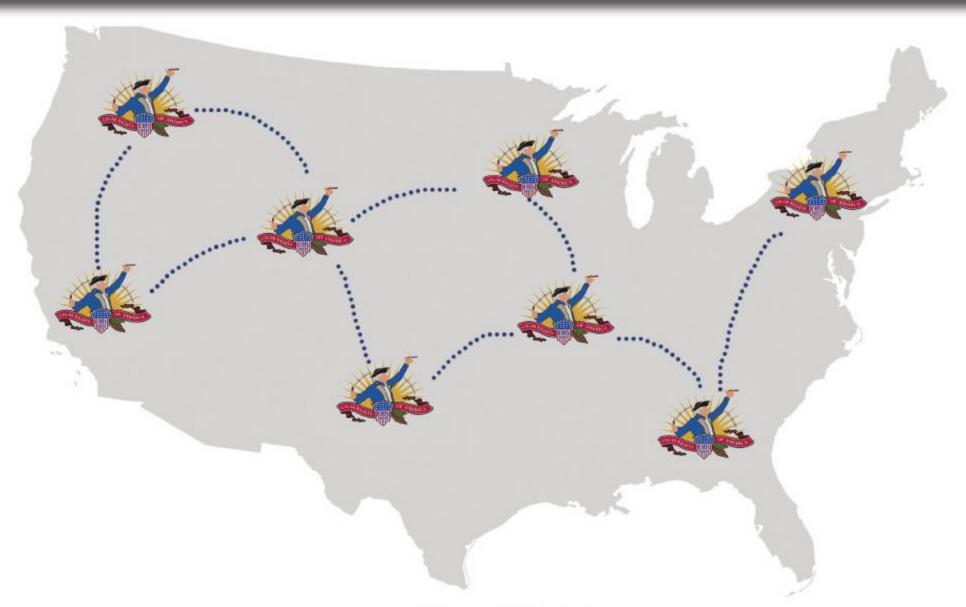
There are offer 33 Bantam flavor, arranged in major categories of Fruits, Beverages, Cereals, Desserts, Menthol, Sweets, and Tobacco.

Twelfth State Brands LLC,

Morrisville, NC, Tel: (833) 979-1595, Email: info@twelfthstatebrands. com Web: bantamvape.com.



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"This is a great program to expose our store to customers that may not know we're here. With more travelers using the internet to find restaurants and hotels, why not for cigar shops too?"

- George 'Shorty' Koebel, Owner of Havana Connections in Richmond, Virginia



"Our businesses need all of the marketing exposure possible, and with CRA appealing to a national audience, this is well worth the cost. I also like the fact that we can have some input on issues affecting the industry."

- Joel Schwartz, Owner of Ford & Haig Tobacconists in Scottsdale, Arizona

"This can be a great way to highlight store events, especially when new cigars are coming onto the market. When the manufacturers are in our shop, this can be a way to reach a broader audience than just those that walk into the store, or that we see on a regular basis."

- Julie Neumann, Owner of Cigars & More in Libertyville, Illinois

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1100 UPDATE ** MERCHANDISE & NEWS FROM THE PIPE WORLD

Vauen Unveils Pipe of the Year 2020

For more than 25 years, German pipe make Vauen has presented its annual pipe of the year, always coming up with completely new and interesting ideas for the pipe's form and design. These pipes' shapes are not available in the regular product range from Vauen, ensuring that each offering is a rare pleasure for any pipe lover to own something this unique.

The 2020 Vauen Pipe of the Year features faceted lines, which always pose a challenge for the company's pipe makers, requiring extra attention and care in their elaborate hand crafting. There are six styles in all, and all accept 9mm filters—three smooth, two partially sandblasted, and one sandblast. The

mouthpiece, including its silver-colored ring, picks up on

these lines. The sterling silver crossed pipes logo is inlaid into the mouthpiece as a mark of quality. Vauen Pipe of the Year 2020 is an exclusive, limited edition and each piece is individually numbered, offering perfection of form and great attention to detail.

Vauen Pipes, Nuremberg, Germany, Tel: 49 911 424 3680, Email: info@vauen; F&K Cigar Co., Saint Louis, Mo., Tel: (314) 721-0711, Web: fkcigar.com.



Visol Epirus Soft Flame Pipe Lighters in Five Styles

The Epirus soft flame pipe lighter from Visol Products was created specifically for the pipe smoker, featuring a gentle, angled soft flame that won't damage briar or meerschaum pipes. In addition, it features a fold-out bowl reamer and tobacco tamper, providing three essential pipe tools conveniently available all in one place.

The lighter is activated by a single action push-button ignition, operates on refillable butane, and has an adjustable flame height. Each lighter is wrapped in a black velvet bag and comes packaged in a cardboard box for easy to gift wrapping. Five styles are offered: silver and gunmetal, gunmetal, black, woodgrain look, and dark woodgrain look. Suggest retail price, \$20, includes a one year manufacture warranty.

Visol Products, Plano, Texas, Tel: (972) 422-5999, Email: info@visolproducts.com, Web: visolproducts.com.





Seattle Pipe Club's Galloping Gertie

Seattle Pipe Club Galloping Gertie is one of the more unique blends created by club member Joe Lankford and crafted by Sutliff Tobacco Company in Richmond, Va. It's a Virginia/Perique blend, but notably some of the Virginias are stoved until black. Some Turkish tobacco is added for an even more intriguing dimension. Finally, the mixture is pressed into a crumble cake to marry and further mature the flavors. The result is a diverse range of palate-pleasing sweet, spicy, earthy, and savory flavors.



SPC Plum Pudding Special Reserve

When Seattle Pipe Club blender Joe Lankford had the opportunity to utilize some well-aged vintage tobaccos that had been stored undiscovered for years, rather than creating a whole new blend, he used them to replace tobaccos in Plum Pudding. This Special Reserve edition is even smoother than the original thanks to the super-matured leaf. It's presented in 4 oz. plugs.

Meier & Dutch, Bethlehem, Pa., Tel: (888) 872-4427, Web: MeierDutch.com.

▶G.L. Pease Releases Spark Plug in Heirloom Series

Gregory Pease, founder and blender of G. L. Pease Tobaccos, artisanal blends crafted in small batches by Cornell & Diehl (C&D), has unveiled his latest release, Spark Plug, which he admits "has been something of a dream project." It's only the sixth blend to

find a home in Pease's Heirloom Series, featuring "tobaccos of exemplary character."

Pease describes the blend as "deep and dark. Powerful yet refined. The smoky, leathery backdrop of Latakia is layered with an almost incenselike spice of rich orientals, with fine Virginias added for depth and a subtle sweetness. Like the classic roadsters that inspired its creation, Spark



Plug has an alluring charm that invites you to rev it up and take it out for long drives in the country. Sliced thick or thin, it will never leave you stranded."

"I've been smoking prototypes for nearly a year, and am absolutely loving the final product," stated Pease. "As always, working with Jeremy at C&D has been a pure and effortless joy, and Calvin has my often impenetrable design briefs and transformed my concept into the wonderful label seen above. My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes out to these guys for their continued willingness to work with wacky ideas and make them a reality. Suggested retail price is \$13.50 per 2 oz. tin.

G.L. Pease, Web: glpease.com, distributed by Cornell & Diehl /Laudisi Enterprises, Inc., Little River, S.C., Tel: (843) 491-4150, Email: sales@laudisi.com, Web: laudisi.com.



Planet Imports Adds New Nox by Pharaohs Hookahs

Pharaohs Hookahs, available through Planet Imports, has added a new full-size hookah series, Nox, featuring screw-on attachments. It measures 20 1/2 inches

tall with an 8 1/2 inch base and accepts up to four 100% washable color-coordinated 72-inch Pharaohs Silk Hose (Pharaohs 2.0 Adapters). The stems have a matte black and matted gold finish, and each unit ships with a Pharaohs Black clay bowl and pair of large tongs in a full-color carton box. Choose from six different color styles: Amber,



Black /Sand, Deep Sea, Grape, Venom, and White/Gold.

Planet Imports, Glendora, Calif., Tel: (909) 599-9393, Email: planetimports@gmail. com, Web: planetimports.com.



New World Luxury Brands Offers Unique Freehand Briars

New World Luxury Brands burst onto the world stage with a noble mission: authentic craftsmanship. The company offering pipe enthusiasts the opportunity to puff from a piece of genuine, hand-whittled art, briar and meerschaum pipes featuring gorgeous textures and ridges that provide unique, one-of-a-kind designs, such as The Hammer 117



smooth. The shank material is hand cut buckhorn, while the mouthpiece is German acrylic with brass plated ring. Billard 116, meanwhile (below), is a whimsical



attract attention. This rusticated billard freehand is made by the best Algerian briar with a black acrylic mouthpiece.

New World Luxury Brands Pte. Ltd., Hong Leong Building. Singapore, Web: newworldpipes.com.

Brand NEWS >>>> PREMIUM & LUXURY TOBACCO PRODUCTS AND OTP

WARNING: This product is not a safe alternative

Dean Swift's Dr. Rumney Nasal Snuff is Back at Arango Cigar Co.

Arango Cigar Co., the midwest's largest distributor of premium cigars, pipes, pipe tobacco and smoker's accessories has brought back Dean Swift's Dr. Rumney Nasal Snuff to the U.S. market, with the help and expertise of McChrystal 's Ltd. Co. Arango is now shipping the long-awaited nasal snuff.

The Dr. Rumney blend is characterized by a bold menthol flavor. The snuff is produced with 100% fine foreign tobacco and is made in the United Kingdom using all-natural ingredients. The nasal snuff is ground very fine and packaged in .31 oz. tins, with a suggested retail price of \$3.10. There are 12 tins to a unit.

Nasal Snuff lovers will find this blend quite robust and appealing, reminiscent of the original, coveted Dr. Rumney blend. Dr. Rumney Nasal Snuff is manufactured in the McChrystal 's factory, run by the family's second and third generation, maintaining the family legacy. McChrystal's was established in 1926.

Arango Cigar Co., Northbrook, Ill., Tel: (800) 222-4427, Email, sales@arangocigarco.com, Web: arangocigarco.com.



Alec Bradley Cigar Co. announced that they will be producing the Black Market Estell blend their proprietary "diamond" shape. Black Market Estell Diamond will be a limited edition 6 1/4 in. x 54 ring gauge extension to the line. Only 1500 boxes of 16 cigars will be produced for global consumption in 2020, and will replace the Nica

> Puro Diamond Rough-Cut which was introduced in 2014. The cigars are being produced at Plasencia Cigars Nicaragua.

"The Nica Puro Diamond Rough-Cut has been a hit with

premium cigar enthusiasts every year since it was introduced," said Jonathan Lipson, Alec Bradley director of sales and marketing. According to Lipson, the shape pays homage to Alec Bradley Founder Alan Rubin's triangular cigar, Trilogy. "For 2020, we wanted change things up a bit and try diamond pressing the superb Black

Market Estell blend," he added.

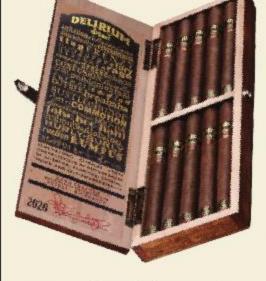
The medium- to full-bodied Diamond features a dark natural wrapper from Nicaragua, a double binder combination of Honduran and Nicaraguan leaves, and fillers

from Nicaragua. The unique diamond shape requires extra care in the blending process, however, and to bolster the blend, the company needed to add an extra leaf of Ligero Habano from Nicaragua in the filler blend. The addition of the leaf makes the blend a little bolder than its regular release cousins.

Black Market Estell Diamonds will be presented in 16-count diamond-shaped boxes and will retail in the U.S. for \$9.85 per cigar, before any applicable taxes. Alec Bradley Cigar Co., Fort Lauderdale, Fla, Tel: (954) 321-5991,

Web: alecbradley.com.





Diesel Adds Delirium

Diesel has rolled out Delirium, a limited-edition offering of the boldest Diesel blend to date. Only 5,000 boxes have been made.

"Diesel Delirium is about disruption," says senior brand manager Justin Andrews. "It's a cigar that demands the smoker's full attention, and while it follows Hair of the Dog, the two blends couldn't be more different." Both Hair of the Dog, which sold out in under three weeks after its release last year, and Delirium are powerhouse smokes, but Delirium's blend has its own unique dimension and balance. "This is a cigar that we recommend enjoying when you have time to commit to really experiencing the full spectrum of taste it delivers," said Andrews.

Developed by Andrews, blended by AJ Fernandez, and crafted at Tabacalera AJ Fernandez in Estelí, Nicaragua, Delirium is made with an Ecuadoran Sumatra wrapper, Connecticut Broadleaf binder and a blend of Nicaraguan ligero and Ometepe filler, offering a peppery smoke with an array of spices, with hints of nuts and a touch of nougat.

Delirium is offered in a single 6" x 52 Toro at a suggested retail price of \$10 per cigar. The cigars are presented in rustic, ten-count wooden boxes. General Cigar Co., Glen Allen, Va., Tel: (804) 935-2809, Web: cigarworld. com, dieselcigar.com.



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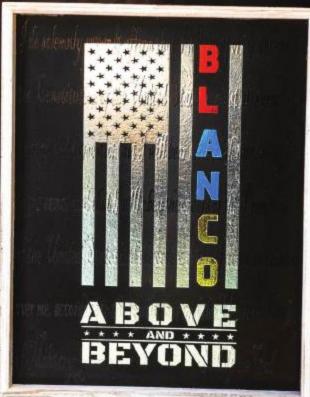
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Brandnews

►Toscanello Rosso Caffè Macchiato Debuts

Inspired by the success of its aromatic Toscanello line in the American Market, Italian cigar maker Manifatture Sigaro Toscano has launched a new product—

Toscanello Rosso Caffè Macchiato, featuring the "warm and comforting sensation of a morning coffee"



mixed with Kentucky fired-cured tobacco and subtle hints of sweetness on the cigar's tip. This new cigar is a variation of the Toscanello Rosso Caffè, but features its own unique blend of

Italian tobaccos from Southern Italy providing a sweeter smoke, combined with the power of American Kentucky fire cured tobacco.

All Toscano aromatic cigars undergo a key process at the MST factory in Cava de' Tirreni in the Southern region of Campania—the aromatizing of the tobacco. After fermentation, the leaves pass through a pneumatic system to the aroma plant where the tobacco is placed inside a cylinder and mixed with an atomizer aroma that provides the desired aromatic intensity. Then it rests for 24 hours inside a closed container to thoroughly absorb the aroma.

The balanced character and soft taste of Toscanello Rosso Caffè Macchiato dark fire cured tobacco enhances the aromatic notes of the coffee, finished with a dark fire cured wrapper with an intense hazelnut color. Finally, a special process is used to sweeten the cigar tip, utilizing a proprietary recipe for a unique product.

Toscano Cigars, Lucca, Italy, Web: toscanocigars.com; distributed in USA by Miami Cigar & Company, Miami, Fla., Tel: (800) 643-7209, Email: info@mccusa.net, Web: miamicigar.com.

General Cigar Introduces Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Selección, a Honduran Puro

Hoyo de Monterrey has launched Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Selección, a new collection that pays homage to the country where the brand has been made for more than five decades. The Honduran puro channels Hoyo de Monterrey's rich history and celebrates the tradition of Honduran cigars and Honduran tobacco that began in the 1950s when the Villazon Cigar Factory was established.

EPICURE SELECTION NO. 1 Ed Lahmann, senior brand manager for Hoyo de Monterrey said, "Epicure Selección speaks to the legacy of Hoyo de Monterrey which is one of the first brands to have been made in Honduras, and one of the first to feature bold blends made with native Cuban seeds cultivated in Central

America. The history of Hoyo de Monterrey was carved out by some of the most revered tobacco men that ever lived, and we honor their contributions to the handmade cigar category with this new collection."

This artisanal collection is made at the HATSA Factory in Danlí, Honduras, utilizing proprietary aging techniques and old world craftsmanship. The exceptionally well-balanced blend delivers a true Honduran smoking experience, derived from proprietary, Cuban seed wrapper, binder, and filler tobaccos. The result is a medium-full cigar rich with peppery and earthy notes, and striking complexity.

Three sizes are offered: No.1 (5.6 x 46), \$8.79 suggested retail per cigar; No. 2 (4.9 x 50), \$8.49 retail; and Toro Especiale (6 x 50), \$8.99 retail. The line is presented in unvarnished cabinet style boxes that each contain 20 cigars, and is now shipping to retailers nationwide.

General Cigar Co., Glen Allen, Va., Tel: (804) 935-2809, Web: cigarworld.com.

New Look Unveiled for H. Upmann Traditional Line

Altadis U.S.A. has given its venerable H. Upmann 1844 core line—the "traditional range—a distinctive, throwback look, reflecting the brand's rich tradition and heritage.

"The H.Upmann Traditional Line, which includes The 1844 Reserve, The 1844 Vintage Cameroon and...Añejo, now has a look and feel that reflects both the rich tradition and the heritage of this iconic brand," said Rafael Nodal, head of product capability, Tabacalera USA.

The 1844 Reserve captures the spirit of H. Upmann with intricate and complex flavors, even burns, and hallmark which ash. This medium-bodied smoke embodies H Upmann's long tradition of exceptional cigar making. This classic cigar is offered in seven frontmarks ranging from a 5 1/2 x 33 Demitasse to a 7 x 50 Churchill, and suggested retail prices from \$2.76 to \$8.39.

The 1844 Vintage Cameroon is a throwback to the early days when cigars in this legendary lineup were each wrapped using Cameroon leaves. It features a subtle

complexity of refined flavors, and is offered in seven frontmarks ranging from a 5 1/2 x 44 Corona to a 7 x 50 Churchill, and suggested retail prices from \$5.61 to \$7.54. Altadis U.S.A., Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Tel: (954) 453-5940, Web: altadisusa.com.



Emilio Cigars releases Limited Edition La Musa

Hand crafted in Esteli, Nicaragua at Fabrica Oveja Negra, the new limited edition La Musa is the first release in this line since the merger of Emilio Cigars and Black Label Trading Company (BLTC) in 2019.

Both the cigar blend and artwork for La Musa were created by James Brown,



owner of BLTC and Fabrica Oveja Negra. Said Brown, "I am very excited to give La Musa a makeover in both appearance and flavor. The artwork is dope and inspired the blend of the cigar. It's a Nicaraguan puro with a very refined, medium bodied profile and layers of complex flavors." Both the binder and wrapper are Nicaraguan Habano leaf, and the filler a blend of Nicaraguan tobaccos.

COHIBA

La Musa is available in Robusto (5 x 50, \$10.50 each suggested retail) and Toro (6 x 50, \$11 each) frontmarks, presented in 25-count boxes.

Emilio Cigars is a brand with old school roots and new school attitude. With an eclectic portfolio, Emilio is sure to have something for everyone.

Oveja Negra Brands, Vineland, N.J., Tel: (512) 410-5093,

Email: info@OvejaNegraCigars.com, Web: ovejanegracigars.com.

Cohiba Royale, General Cigar's Latest Super-Premium Offering, Now Shipping

General Cigar Company's latest full-time addition to its Cohiba portfolio—the super-premium Cohiba Royale—marks several important milestones for the brand, as it is Cohiba's fullest-bodied expression to date and the first Cohiba line to be produced in Honduras, crafted at the company's HATSA factory in Danlí.

"Cohiba Royale was created with the cigar connoisseur in mind, bringing to life the microclimates and fertile soils of the Caribbean and Central America in a way that is unique to the brand," Cohiba brand ambassador Sean Williams said.

The multi-national blend features filler tobaccos from Honduras' Jamastran Valley as well as the Nicaraguan valleys of Jalapa and Estelí; a Dominican Piloto Cubano binder; and a lustrous, sun-grown wrapper from Jalapa. Each leaf of the blend has undergone intensive aging for five to six years, resulting in a balanced cigar described as "sublime," with notes of leather and spice mingling with nuances of earth and cedar.

Cohiba Royal is offered in three sizes, available in both five-count and tencount boxes: Gran Royale (4 1/2" x 52, suggested retail \$23.99 per cigar; Robusto Royale (5 1/2" x 54, \$25.99 retail; and Toro Royale (6 x 50, \$28.99 retail).

In support of Cohiba Royale, Williams will visit fine cigar shops nationwide to share the blend with discerning cigar smokers.

General Cigar Co., Glen Allen, Va., Tel: (804) 935-2809, Web: cigarworld.com.



Avanti Cigar Adds Cherry Line Extension

Avanti Cigar Company, a domestic producer of dark fire -cured cigars, has extended its namesake Avanti Cigar brand with the addition of a new Cherry flavor. This new offering pairs the "velvety and intriguing sour touch of mature cherries... with the intense wood notes of dark fired Kentucky tobacco," according to an announcement from the manufacturer.

Avanti Cigars are produced in Dunmore, Penn. from tobaccos grown in Kentucky and Tennessee that have been fire-cured in barns utilizing smoke from hickory and oak wood, then fermented and aged a minimum of two years, developing

deep, rich flavors and full body profile. Cigars are rolled "wet," without a binder, and then allowed to age four to five weeks where a secondary fermentation occurs. Finished cigars measure 4 1/2 inches and come in packs of five cigars, individually wrapped, 10 10 packs per unit.

Avanti Cherry joins the four existing flavors of Avanti Anisette, Avanti Vanilla, Avanti Licorice, Avanti Bourbon, and Avanti Cafè Mocha (an online exclusive).

Avanti Cigar Company,

Dunmore, Pa., Tel: (570) 344.8566, Web: avanticigar.com.

▶ Altadis U.S.A. Introduces the H. Upmann Añejo

The H. Upmann 1844 Añejo has joined a newly repackaged 1844 line as the latest addition to the iconic H.Upmann portfolio.

The 1844 Añejo is a complex, medium to full bodied cigar that uses a rich, well-balanced filler that is blended with tobaccos originating from

> Nicaragua, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. The cigar was blended by Ernesto Kranwinkel from Tabacalera USA Product Capability, in coordination with the Grupo de Maestros from Flor de Copan in Honduras where it is produced.

"Anchored by a sweet Broadleaf binder and wrapped in a dark, double-fermented wrapper, this cigar offers a deep aroma with a bold finish," said Rafael Nodal, Head of

Product Capability, Tabacalera USA.

The 1844 Añejo is packaged in line with the recently updated 1844 Reserve and the popular 1844 Vintage Cameroon to deliver a presentation that reflects both the rich tradition and heritage of this iconic brand.

1844 Añejo comes in boxes of 25 and is offered in three sought-after sizes: 54 x 6 Toro, 50 x 5 Robusto, and 60 x 6 Magnum. The suggested retail price ranges from \$7.10 to \$8.10 per cigar.

Altadis U.S.A., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., Tel: (954) 772-9000, Web: altadisusa.com.

Avo Improvisation Limited Edition 2020 Ships

Davidoff Cigars has announced the eighth edition of the award-winning Avo Improvisations Series. The annually launched Limited Edition was inspired by Avo Cigars founder and legendary jazz composer Avo Uvezian.

"The Avo Improvisation 2020 is the eighth rendition of the highly anticipated annual series," said Edward Simon, chief marketing officer at Oettinger Davidoff AG. "Avo Uvezian believed that life is to be enjoyed fully and that one needs to go beyond the ordinary by taking risks and seizing opportunities whenever possible... We honor the legacy and philosophy of Avo Uvezian with this one of kind masterpiece.





The medium strength Avo

Improvisation 2020 blend contains Dominican San Vicente Ligero, Piloto Ligero, and San Vicente Seco with Peruvian Piloto Visus filler leaves; Dominican Semilla 151 Seco binder; and a golden Ecuadorian Connecticut wrapper that deliver a complex and elegant experience, creamy flavors, and an initial aroma that features a combination of sweet cedar and earth.

The cigar is offered in a single 6 1/2" x 50 ring gauge Toro format, and presented in 14-count transparent boxes containing dual cedar trays. Suggested retail price is \$16 per cigar. Global production is limited to 4,400 boxes, with 2,500 boxes allocated for the U.S. sale.

Davidoff of Geneva USA, Inc., Pinellas Park, Fla., Tel: (727) 828-5400, Web: us.davidoffgeneva.com

Punch Launches Knuckle Buster

General Cigar Company's Punch brand has launched a new full-time, line called Knuckle Buster that the company describes as "wallet- and palate-pleasing." The three-cigar collection began shipping to retailers in March.

Named for a phrase made famous by a university basketball coach who described a rough and tumble physical game as a "Blue Collar Knuckle Buster," the Punch Knuckle Buster was created to

deliver a hardworking blend for hard working people.

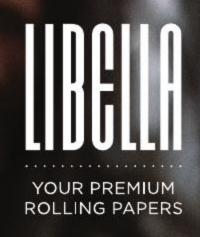
Ed Lahmann, senior brand manager for Punch said, "Punch is committed to staying true to what the brand has

represented

over the last six decades: a consistent, well-made, no-nonsense cigar at a price that's fair and reasonable."

Punch's blending team at the HATSA cigar factory set out to make a medium-bodied cigar that would appeal to both new and seasoned smokers. They selected only Habano-seed tobaccos from Nicaragua and Honduras to deliver when it comes to balancing flavor and strength with complexity. Knuckle Buster has a Nicaraguan Habano wrapper, a Nicaraguan Habano binder and its filler tobaccos are from Nicaragua and Honduras. Three sizes are offered: Robusto (4 1/2" x 52, \$4.99 suggested retail and Toro (6" x 50, \$5.49 retail), presented in 25 count boxes, and Gordo (6 1/4 x 60, \$5.99 retail), available in 20 count boxes.

General Cigar Co., Glen Allen, Va., Tel: (804) 935-2809, Web: cigarworld.com.



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>Défi XXtrême: First Twin Flame Torch Lighter from S.T. Dupont

French luxury goods maker S.T. Dupont has extended the innovative design features of its single flame Défi Extrême torch flame lighter with the release of its first dual flame

torch model, the Défi XXtrême.



Its double pyramid-shape torches allow for igniting twice as fast, even in extreme conditions, and are capable of withstanding force 7 winds. These powerful blue flame torches will light in any weather condition and at altitudes up to 3,500 meters and in temperatures from -10° to 45° C.

Faultless functioning is guaranteed by a new fuel specifically developed by S.T. Dupont that

allows the lighter to withstand extreme shifts in temperature.

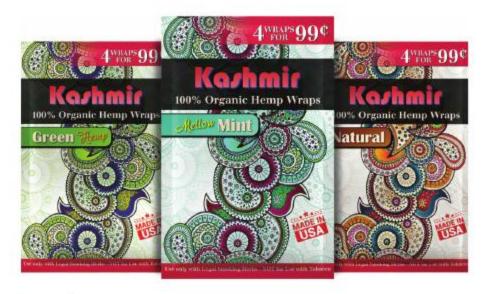
This model also features a shock-proof bumper made from a high impact-resistant, semi-rigid material that protects the lighter and ensures a secure grip. The intuitive design makes it particularly easy to hold and use, while its fuel level-viewing window and flame adjuster ensures users have full control of the torch flame in all circumstances. Available in red or black, suggested retail \$398.

Davidoff of Geneva U.S.A., Inc., Pinellas Park, Fla., Tel: (727) 828-5400, Web: davidoff.com.

>Visol Archibold Matte Black Stainless Steel Cigar Scissors

Ideal for both old-school cigar connoisseurs, as well as any more recent cigar enthusiasts looking to elevate their cigar clipping routine, these premium quality cigar scissors are perfect for size or shape cigar. Their razor sharp blades will clip cigars perfectly every time, while the large handles make use a breeze. The heavy duty construction enables these scissors to retain their sharp edge so dulling over time won't be a worry. Featuring stainless steel construction and a contemporary matte black finish, their thin design allows them to fit easily in a jacket pocket. Ships with gift box. Suggested retail, \$40.

Visol Products, Plano, Texas, Tel: (972) 422-5999, Email: info@visolproducts.com, Web: visolproducts.com.



>Kashmir 100% Organic Hemp Wraps

Kashmir 100% Organic Hemp Wraps from Inter-Continental Trading, Inc., are the superior choice over the tobacco-based wraps on the market today. Along with an even, slow burn, Kashmir wraps are vegan-friendly, GMO- and nicotine-free, and available in three varieties—Natural, Green, and Mellow Mint. The handy, resealable four-count foil pouch keeps wraps fresh for a great-tasting smoke every time. There are 15 packs per countertop POS display, and 24 displays per case.

Inter-Continental Trading, Inc., Mount Prospect, Ill., Tel: (847) 640-1777, Email: info@ictusainc.com, Web: ictusainc.com.



>Humi-Smart 2-Way Humidity Control Now Through Sutliff Tobacco

Sutliff Tobacco Company has been named the U.S. distributor of Humi-Smart 2-Way Humidity Control Packs. Humi-Smart's two-way humidity control technology responds to the environment they are placed in-either releasing or absorbing moisture as needed to ensure the optimal environment for everything from your favorite pantry items to rare cigars. Safe, all-organic minerals and plant based fibers are 100% non-toxic—all natural, no corrosives and no salts—so they won't alter the taste of cigars or subtle tobacco flavors. Humi-Smart packets are offered in four different humidity levels—55% for pipe tobacco, and 65%, 69%, and 72% for cigars and tobacco—in a range of sizes appropriate for different size humidors or pouches. Each packet includes an indicator card that changes from pink to blue when packets need to be replaced. Sutliff Tobacco Company, Richmond, Va., Tel: (804) 233-7668, Email: info@sutliff-tobacco.com, Web: sutliff-tobacco.com.

>Colibri Adds Heritage Humidor

Designed in London with a modern twist, Colibri's Heritage Humidor draws inspiration from the company's Quasar design theme, trading the characteristic pyramid-surfaced cubes with a sleek, minimalist rendition of stacked, chamfered-edge cubes. These quality units feature cedar linings to properly preserve cigars and can accommodate between 100 and 125 sticks, depending upon size. Heritage features full quadrant hinges, a digital hygrom-

eter, an adjustable and magnetic humidification system for flexible positioning, and two dividers for custom organization. Three different matte finish colors are available: black, red, and gray. The product comes with a two-year warranty, suggested retail \$495.

Colibri Group, New York, N.Y., Web: colibri.com.



>Customized Ceramic Cigar Ashtrays Crafted in China by Han

HanRiver Ceramics Factory ChaoZhou (HRCF) specializes in producing stock, customized, and logo-imprinted ceramic and porcelain cigar ashtrays, among other ceramic and porcelain home goods. The company was established in ChaoZhou, China in 1997 and opened a new branch—Chaoan Yifang Ceramics Industrial Factory—in 2007.

A wide range of standard models in a variety of shape with cigar rests for one to four cigars, can be customized with logos or designs, printed and kiln fired at 800 degrees for lasting durability. OEM work is also gladly accommodated. Minimum order quantities start at 100 to 500 units, depending upon model and configuration. Color gift box is included





>Mirage Dual Torch Lighters from Bugatti Feature Butane Fuel Pods

Bugatti's Mirage dual flame torch lighter, like the company's adjustable angle Vulcan model, features two modular innovations—a replaceable 18ml butane fuel pod that eliminates sloppy refills, purging, and bleeding; and a replaceable burner unit that can be swapped out in seconds without tools when clogged jets have reduced performance. Each fuel pod can light approximately 100 cigars, while the replaceable burner unit means like-new performance instantly, without the need for sending units out for time-consuming after-service. Mirage lighters ship with one replacement fuel pod and two replacement burners. Other features include an all-metal die-cast housing, flipup protective lid, a single action premium piezo ignition, adjustable twin pinpoint windproof torch flame. Color styles include chrome velour bodies with either blue, yellow, or purple accents, and matte gun bodies with green, red, or black highlights. Suggested retail, \$99.

Bugatti Group LLC, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Tel: (877) 322-4427, Web: bugattilighters.com.













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